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MOVIE AND TV THEMES**

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**HARRY POTTER  
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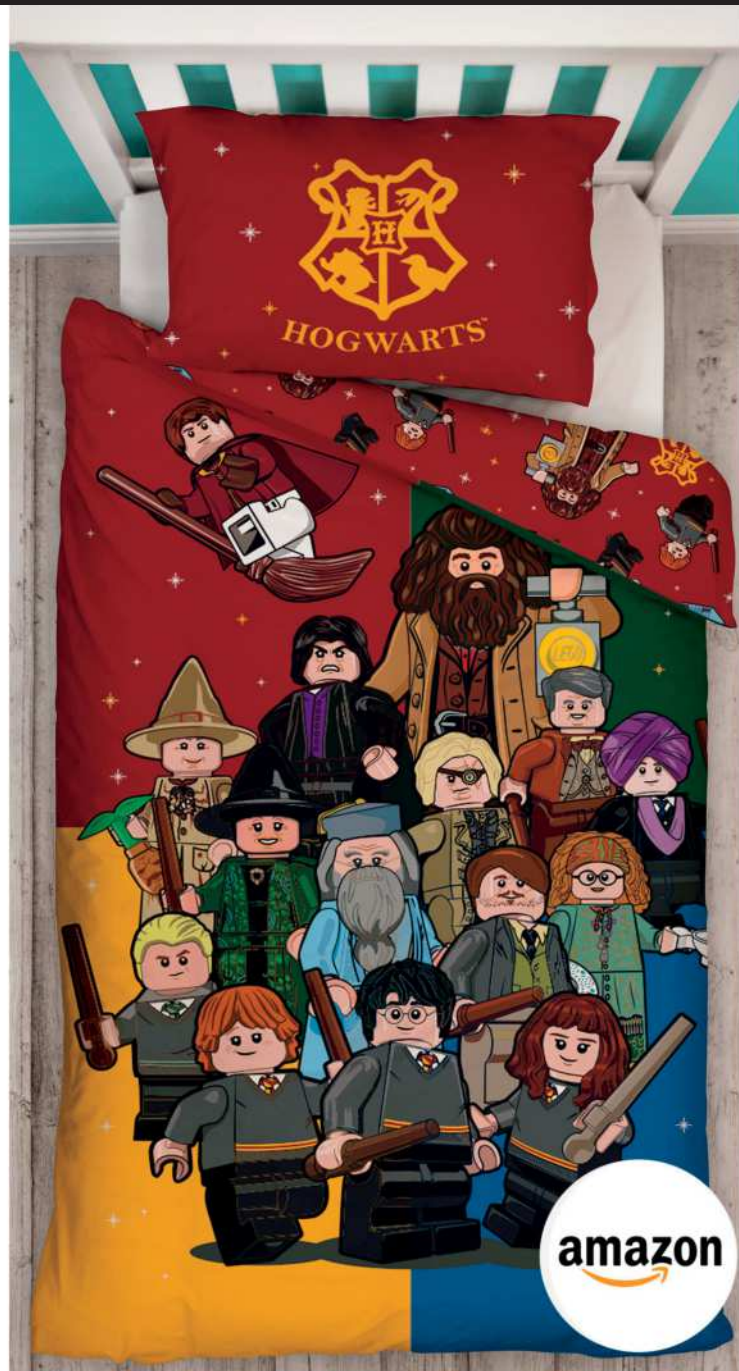


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# Blocks

ISSUE 96 // 2022

## MEET THE TEAM



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A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.



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**PHIL WRIGHTON**

Models never look better than when this prize winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.



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**KAT-REES JAUIKE**

Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets to see if they are satisfying to build and look impressive on display.



### REVIEWS WRITER //

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# WELCOME



Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton

**WITH  
20 YEARS OF  
SERIOUS LEGO  
LICENSING  
DEALS BEHIND  
US, WE CRUNCH  
THE NUMBERS**



**A**s we're approaching Christmas, it's time to start considering what LEGO sets you should drop not-so-subtle hints to friends and family about. This month's Reviews section should certainly help with that, as whether you prefer City, Friends, Star Wars, Harry Potter, Super Mario or Speed Champions, we've got you covered.

That said, the Speed Champions set we're reviewing isn't Speed Champions as you've come to know it. Cars inspired by movies are joining the theme, including the Aston Martin DB5. This has led to the first ever James Bond minifigure, who we couldn't resist putting on the cover.

007 doesn't only turn up in this set though – he can also be found at LEGO Store Leicester Square as part of the location's reimagining. You can read our report from the UK's flagship – and now again the world's largest – brand store in Month in LEGO.

Seeing franchise characters take up so much space in a LEGO Store will reignite the debate about whether too many LEGO sets lean on popular franchises and brands; with 20 years of serious LEGO licensing deals behind us, we crunch the numbers to see how the balance has shifted over time.

Going back to the simpler days before licensed themes, we're also learning how the first ever LEGO CD-ROM was developed, revisiting classic Aquasharks sets and investigating the mystery of Minitalia.

Leg godt!

**Graham Hancock**

Editor // graham@blocksmag.com

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# WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN!

Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **LEGO 75337 AT-TE WALKER**. You'll also be automatically entered into our monthly prize draws to win the latest and greatest LEGO sets. See **page 79** now!



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# LEGOtalk



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FIVE YEARS  
AGO THIS  
MONTH...



The LEGO NINJAGO Movie was about to arrive in cinemas and Blocks magazine had the biggest, best behind-the-scenes access.



## INSTAGRAM SPOTLIGHT

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## PRIZE WINNER

Sam Galer was the lucky winner of our prize draw for 10302 Transformers Optimus Prime. Every month we give away new LEGO prizes to our subscribers – take out a Blocks magazine subscription to be in with a chance of winning.





**DEAR BLOCKS,**

I built the LEGO Titanic and couldn't resist adding to it. The iceberg was inspired by the one in Issue 88 of your magazine. I just did not stop and continued to build it a bit larger.

I have always been a Titanic enthusiast and many of the details were drawn from my library of books and photos. While it is not an absolute scale copy, it is taken to the next level over the basic kit. I had lot of fun in trying to find details and then copying them with LEGO bricks.

Every detail was done with LEGO blocks, except for the decals I put on the signs on the stern. I added the White Star flag, skylights over the staircases and rigging to the mast and stacks. I modified the crane on the bow to be smaller and in scale. As you can see from the photos, I added a lot of detail to the deck.

The rigging and modifications for the mounts took some time to sort out. One modification often led to another. The joy was similar to building an aircraft carrier and arranging the deck. I would like to do some deck chairs but they are tough to do. The scale makes them so small and I have not found suitable blocks to keep them close to scale.

People keep thinking that this is a scale model kit, not a LEGO kit. I had a shelf made for it so it is easy accessible.

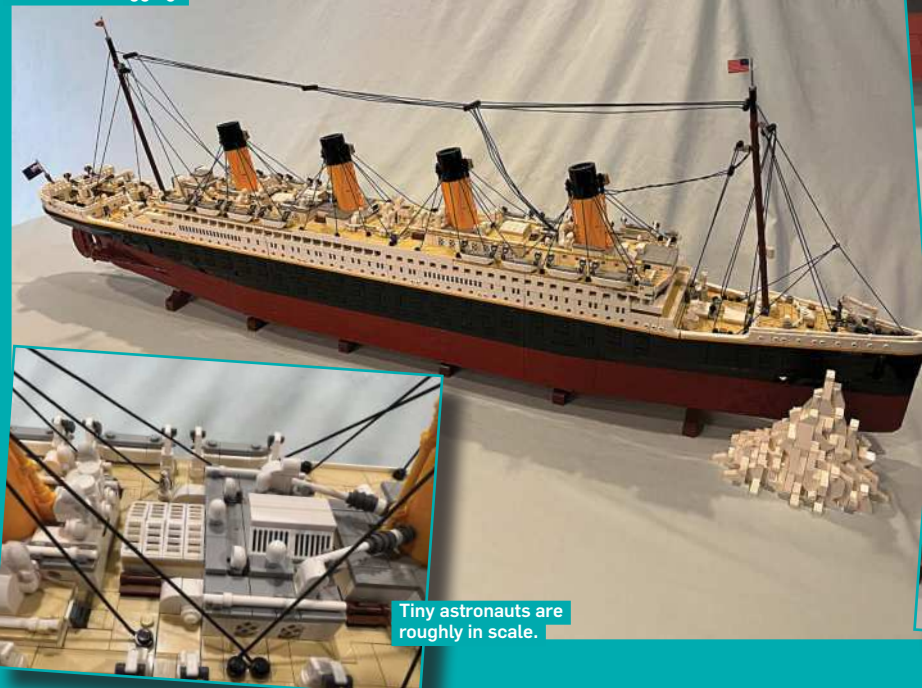
**Scott Swisher**

**That is an epic mod project Scott, thank you so much for sharing it. This sums up what is so great about a LEGO set; once you've spent all of that time building the model using the instructions, the journey isn't over. Modding official sets is a great way to enjoy them further and get deeper into the LEGO System. Congratulations on completing something so impressive – Graham**

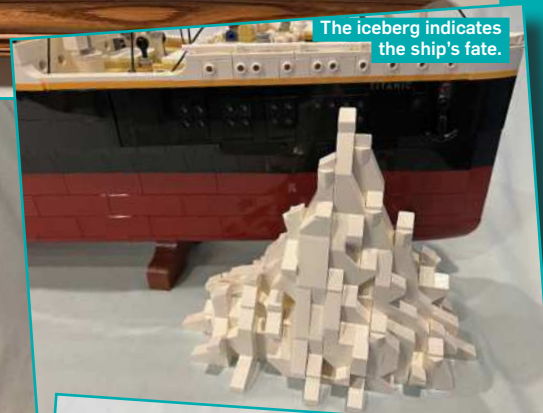


Scott has the perfect spot for the model.

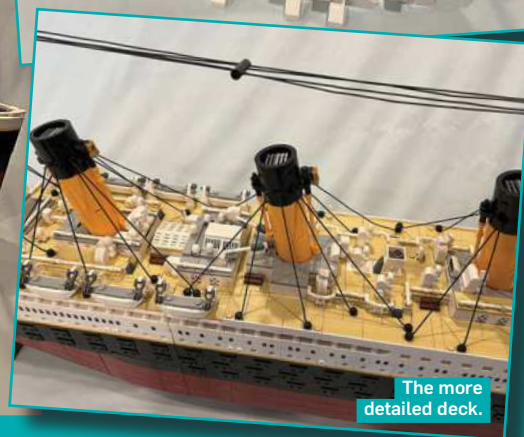
Among many modifications, Scott added more rigging.



Tiny astronauts are roughly in scale.



The iceberg indicates the ship's fate.



The more detailed deck.



# PULLING IN AT PLATFORM 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

The latest Harry Potter display model is about the journey, not the destination



This is the latest high end Harry Potter display model.





**HOW DO YOU** reach a magical school hidden in the wilds of Scotland? It was the Ministry of Magic that solved the problem when they procured a Muggle-built 460 Hall Class GWR 5900 steam train. It's better known to students and professors alike as the Hogwarts Express.

While Vernon Dursley thought it was a rather mundane way for witches and wizards to travel, Harry Potter certainly didn't think so. The gleaming red locomotive has featured throughout Wizarding World stories, in the books, the films and The Cursed Child stage play.

76405 Hogwarts Express Collectors' Edition is the sixth time the iconic train has been recreated in LEGO bricks, although the 5,129 piece set is by far the largest, measuring in at a whopping 118cm long. It features a turning lever to rotate the front driving wheels, three interior light bricks in the carriages and replicates four key scenes from the Harry Potter story.

'When we were working on this set, we wanted to bring to life different moments from across the movies,' said LEGO Master Designer Marcos Bessa. The set includes printed plaques featuring iconic movie lines, providing an extra level of nostalgia for Potterheads. Sections of the carriage walls can be removed to see little scenes playing out inside.

It's designed to be a display centrepiece, so

## **WE WANTED TO BRING TO LIFE DIFFERENT MOMENTS FROM ACROSS THE MOVIES**

the adjoining Platform 9¾ can be attached in several different ways and there's a replica Hogwarts Express ticket to complement the model.

76405 Hogwarts Express Collector's Edition also comes with 20 unique minifigures, from a young Harry Potter with taped-up glasses to the sweet-bearing Trolley Witch who can shape-shift to protect the train.

'Whether your favourite is the original trio meeting on the train or moments from movies later in the series, this set really brings back spellbinding memories from the Harry Potter films,' Marcos added. For the first time there'll be the opportunity to collect characters based on the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 – Albus Potter and his older brother James, along with older versions of Harry and Ginny with new facial prints.

With the new train at 1:32 scale, the tracks are built with bricks rather than using the typical LEGO elements, so this is very much for display rather than running around a layout. Harry Potter often wished that the ride from Hogwarts would never end, and that sense of wonder, the possibility that comes from any journey, is something fans will hope to get a sense of when building this set. ■

**76405 HOGWARTS EXPRESS COLLECTORS' EDITION IS AVAILABLE NOW.**



# EXPANSION CONTINUES

The LEGO Group officially opens a huge factory expansion in Mexico

The LEGO Group has expanded in Mexico.



**IT SEEMS THAT** not a month goes by without the LEGO Group announcing a new factory. While many of the new projects, including the US factory, are years from completion, the 33,850m<sup>2</sup> expansion of the Monterrey, Mexico factory has officially opened. It is part of a \$500 million investment in the site.

This new capacity includes a fully automated high-bay warehouse and a building dedicated to assembling LEGO products. There's still more to come though, with a new moulding building due to come online late in 2024 that will provide a

50% increase in production capacity.

'We are the largest LEGO manufacturing

**WE ARE THE LARGEST  
LEGO MANUFACTURING  
FACILITY IN THE WORLD**

facility in the world,' said Senior Vice President, Americas Manufacturing, Nancy Sanchez.

'Since opening in 2008 we have benefited from great support in Nuevo Leon. We have amazing colleagues, a great pool of talent to recruit from thanks to a strong labour market and education system, and a positive operating environment. Combined this has given us confidence to continue to invest in the site to support growth in the region.'

When the announced construction projects are complete, the LEGO Group will have seven production sites around the world. ■



#### ■ SET OF THE MONTH // 40571 WINTERTIME POLAR BEARS

Animals have been the focus of the LEGO Store exclusive holiday models this year and two polar bears are a great way to wrap things up for the biggest occasion of them all. These snow-coloured furry friends come with a Christmas tree model and a sleigh for the smaller critter to try out. This is one of several festive models to collect during the 2022 holiday season.

#### ■ PRODUCT OF THE MONTH // MINIFIGURE SPACE MISSION JIGSAW

Last year LEGO Ideas held a contest to find a design for a new jigsaw puzzle. The winner was user *aido\_k*, who created a beautiful image showing the Classic Space logo made up of hundreds of astronaut minifigures. In amidst the blue, yellow and red Classic Space minifigures are a few interlopers from other factions.



# RETURN OF THE VIKINGS

The fans have voted and Viking Village is coming to LEGO Ideas

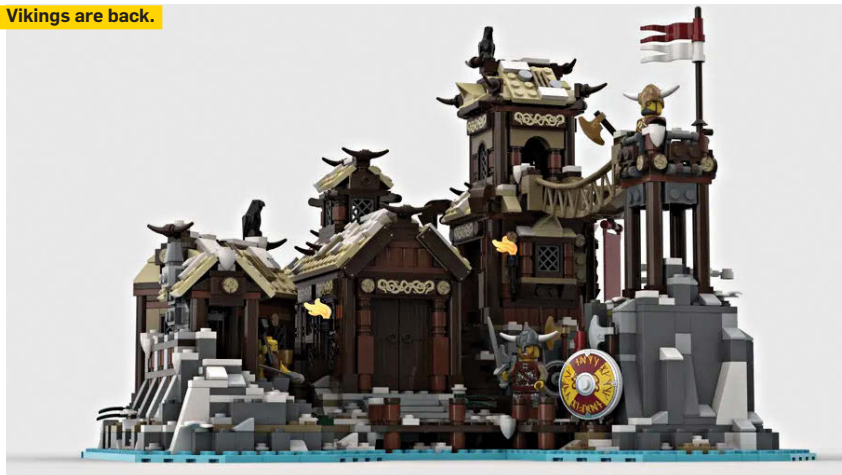
#### LEGO IDEAS IS

continuing to find new ways to get extra fan designs released, this time through a collaboration with US retailer Target. Ideas users were asked to vote for one of three designs that made it to 10,000 votes but were rejected by the LEGO Group; Working Mini Golf Course, Viking Village and Marine Life.

Viking Village easily beat out the competition with 16,317 votes. Florian 'BrickHammer' designed the model to depict a snowy Viking settlement by the water.

'I wanted to create the feel of a whole village, which is a difficult thing to achieve while trying to stay below a certain number of bricks,' he told the Ideas team. 'Therefore, I had to try out different sizes of buildings

#### Vikings are back.



and calculate how many pieces it would roughly take to build the village in a certain size while still having enough pieces left for decoration and details.'

It's now going through the official LEGO design process and will be released exclusively at Target stores in the USA. Elsewhere, fans will be able to get it at official LEGO brand outlets. ■

## JUST THE FACTS

### 21335 MOTORISED LIGHTHOUSE

Sandro Quattrini submitted his build to LEGO Ideas.

The set contains 2,065 pieces.

Nanoscale has been upgraded to minifigure scale for the official model.

The lighthouse is 50cm tall.

A battery box, medium motor and cable with lights power the lighthouse.

21335 Motorized Lighthouse is available now.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ■ HOGWARTS ERRORS

76405 Hogwarts Express Collectors' Edition has a couple of typos, spotted by the eagle-eyed fans who received the set early. The sticker has text referring to King's Cross Station as King Cross Station, while the GWR 4900 Class 5972 is referred to as the GWR 5900 Class 5972. If a multi-billion pound company can make such mistakes...

#### ■ BIONICLE GAMEPLAY

Talented fan developers are working on BIONICLE: Masks of Power in Unreal Engine 5, bringing the original characters to life in a modern video game. The first gameplay footage has been shared on YouTube and it looks fantastic.

#### ■ PICK NEW BRICKS

Some novelty elements from 2022 are finally being added to the Pick a Brick online shop. Since the previous two disparate element ordering services were merged, users have found the replacement to be both less reliable and less responsive when it comes to offering new parts. Being able to order pieces from the first half of 2022 is hopefully the beginning of an improved service.

#### ■ BRICKTALES PLATFORMS

The new Bricktales game is due for release this year and now the platforms it will land on have been announced. Players will be able to build their way through challenges on PC, PS4, PS5, XBOX X/S, Xbox One and Switch.



# REBUILD A TRAINER

As part of the 90 Years of Play celebrations, London's flagship Adidas store offered the chance to customise a mini Superstar with LEGO bricks

Meet donut head and their blingy sneaker.



LEGO builds decorate areas of the store.

**DURING AUGUST, THE** UK's flagship Adidas store on Oxford Street, London, got involved with the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary celebrations. On select dates, visitors to the store could sign up to customise their own LEGO Superstar trainer.

Those who attended the workshops were seated around a table in the store and given 40486 Mini Adidas Originals Superstar. First, the set needed opening up; it was then a case of following the instructions – with a twist. On the table were tubs of elements in blue, red, yellow

and green; you could switch out the black for any of these colours or a combination of them.

Once that base sneaker was built, additional decorative elements were provided to customise the shoe further. These were mainly recognisable printed parts, such as bees, donuts and \$100 bills.

Parts fiends will be interested to know that the set's exclusive 1x2 tile, printed with a unique stripe to suit the Superstars model, was also available in blue, green, yellow and red. These currently seem to be exclusive to the event,

though it is unlikely that pieces would have been printed just for this one purpose – so they may show up again later.

What worked really well about the event is that even those who don't consider themselves creative builders could get stuck in. By starting with a set built by instructions, it didn't take much to make changes to it and colour swapping was incredibly easy thanks to the labelled parts on hand. It's a reminder that you don't have to start entirely from scratch if you want to build more creatively with your bricks.

The regular set elements to start from.

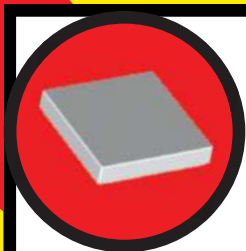


Other colours to switch the black for.



Extra pieces offered customisation options.





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# INSIDE THE WORLD'S LARGEST LEGO STORE

LEGO Store Leicester Square has reopened in London with an entirely new interior featuring Harry Potter, James Bond and 90 Years of Play

**Words:** Anthony Walker-Cook, Graham Hancock **Pics:** Graham Hancock, the LEGO Group



**LONDON'S FLAGSHIP LEGO** Store is back. The Leicester Square venue reopened on August 10, with thousands turning up to get a peek inside the refreshed shop, which had been closed for several months while it was reimaged. That transformation was not a small undertaking, with a very significant renovation having taken place.

What is immediately striking is the store's size. The extension has doubled the upstairs area, allowing the downstairs to focus on some of the incredible new set pieces and enormous, UK-focused brick-built models.

Those enormous LEGO displays are all impressive. Harry Potter has a distinctive but unsurprising presence in the store given how closely associated the stories are with Britain and London in particular. Starting on that bottom floor and going all the way up to the top floor is a Gringotts Bank façade, inside which

you'll find a goblin bank clerk sitting imperiously at his desk and the Ukrainian Ironbelly dragon making its destructive escape on top.

Models of Harry, Ron, Hermione and (a rather small) Hagrid stand in front of a Diagon Alley

## 🇬🇧 EVEN MORE BRITISH THAN HARRY POTTER IS 007 HIMSELF 🇬🇧

backdrop, plus there's an area for Slytherins to go and see Voldemort, Bellatrix Lestrange and Nagini.

Even more British than Harry Potter is 007 himself. James Bond has conveniently stepped out of his full-scale LEGO brick Aston Martin DB5 so that you can sit inside for a photo op and see what some of the buttons do – no-one has

been ejected at the time of writing.

There are other models and themes on display too. William Shakespeare is sat on a bench waiting for the double decker London bus, while Spider-Man swings above the entrance – this could be a reference to his escapades in *Far From Home*, as it's the only clear connection he has to the UK capital.

One model that also deserves a special mention is a large tree that greets you as you walk in. The full height of the first store, the Tree of Discovery metaphorically reminds you that any build always starts with one brick – from there, the imagination will help it will grow and be as colourful as you want it to be. This is conveyed by DUPLO inspiration at the roots, System up the trunk and then Technic at the top. The centrepiece is a key component of all the large modern LEGO Stores, but this one has some fun London embellishments to spot.





The store is a vibrant, exciting place with plenty to see and there are numerous interactive experiences within it. Alongside posing for innumerable photographs, you can look through magnifying glasses at larger sets, enjoying the details within, build something at a creation table or try out a product like DOTS or Super Mario with the help of store employees.

That tactile experience continues with some of the bespoke products that are available. Alongside the Pick and Build wall, there are open trays of minifigure pieces for the Build a Minifigure station, the Minifigure Factory screens to manipulate and the Mosaic Maker booth. The only disappointment is that there is no new addition to the customisation offerings; all of these options were available prior to the transformation.

What is entirely new and exciting is the 90 Years of Play exhibition, allowing visitors to walk through the history of the LEGO Group and see treasures rarely allowed outside of the company's headquarters in Billund, Denmark. Technology from LEGO House has even travelled over so you can look back at childhood boxes.

It therefore feels a gross underestimation to refer to this new building in Leicester Square as a 'store', as it's so much more. It's part museum, part interactive workshop and an undoubtedly fun experience – that the walls are lined with LEGO sets that you can purchase and take home is almost a bonus.

Now that this space has re-opened, it has become the largest LEGO store in the world. It is likely that there will be queues to get into the building for many months to come, but they're worth it for the experience of seeing the LEGO brand represented in all its glory.





# INTO THE ARCHIVES FOR THE ANNIVERSARY

A special exhibition gives visitors an opportunity to walk through the LEGO Group's 90 year history

**WITHIN THE LEICESTER** Square LEGO Store, there's the 90 Years of Play exhibition, which takes guests through the history of the LEGO Group from the 1930s to the modern day. Schematic designs for LEGO bricks and minifigures between the 1950s and 1970s move more towards outlines of modern themes as the timeline edges closer the modern era. It's amazing to see in such a clear way how the LEGO brand has evolved.

Display cases filled with treasures are also present – seeing 375 Castle in real life is a particular high point. There's also a display case with some of the early wooden toys (including that adorable duck) made by the company. Perhaps most exciting are the prototype elements and models from Friends and NINJAGO (some of which you may have seen before in this very magazine). But it's not just about the past – there's an area dedicated to the

initiatives that the LEGO Group is taking to be more eco-friendly, like paper bags in sets.

Finally, there's a digital set database. On the consoles you can find boxed pictures of every set organised by year. This database, and the exhibition more generally, is a great addition to the store – it invites each visitor to relive their personal history with LEGO sets and people from different generations to compare their favourite models and share memories.

The walk-through exhibition is packed with treasures.



374 Fire Station.



NINJAGO sketch models.



The beloved 375 Castle.



# INVESTING IN STORES

Senior Vice President Natali Stojovic explains what the LEGO Group hopes to deliver through the refreshed store



**THE LEGO GROUP** arranged a very special opening event on August 10 to the delight of those waiting outside, bringing Lester the minifigure in on a red double decker bus – the same day that the LEGO Group celebrated its 90th anniversary.

'We've always had a large fanbase in the UK so it's a great pleasure to be opening the largest store in the world here,' Natali Stojovic, Senior Vice President LEGO Retail, said as she introduced the store at a preview. 'It's really exciting to be showcasing our new retail concept to the UK and any visitors. And what better time than to coincide with our 90th anniversary?'

'You can see all the stories of Britain around us. This is one of the key inspirations. You have probably noticed William Shakespeare, Sherlock Holmes next to Big Ben, Harry Potter, Spider-Man swinging through London and obviously James Bond.'

'Then there are the interactive and immersive experiences. Hands-on play is a big theme. You will have seen the Tree of Discovery as you walked in, children will be crawling all over it as soon as they see it. Then the interactive storytelling zone, we don't have that anywhere else in the world. Lastly the Personalisation Studio, where you have the Mosaic Maker, the Minifigure Factory, the Build a Minifigure, that's a zone that our shoppers absolutely love.'

While the LEGO Group has heavily invested in the company's online shop over the last few years, there has been a significant investment in physical locations at the same time. 'Our research shows that physical stores are one of the most important experiences to discover physical product so for us it's a key strategy to keep expanding stores, investing in retail spaces and really providing our shoppers hands-on experiences.' ■



Touch screens allow you to revisit classic models.



Prototypes for what became the mini-doll.



A classic wooden duck.



## TOP TEN

## LEGO LIGHTHOUSES

With 21335 Motorised Lighthouse lighting up fans' collections, here are ten more beacons from the LEGO back catalogue

Words: Anthony Walker-Cook Pics: The LEGO Group

#### 10. 60274 ELITE POLICE LIGHTHOUSE CAPTURE

For £17.99, you can't expect a lot – and 60274 Elite Police Lighthouse Capture presents but the bare bones of a lighthouse. As later entries on this list demonstrate, the lighthouse has offered many LEGO designers the opportunity to experiment. In this case, you get the basics of a lighthouse build – a red-and-white colour scheme, a wooden jetty and a rocky base for the lighthouse. There's the added action of Rooky Partnur chasing Vito in her helicopter and the shark is a good reminder that under the waves there can be all manner of dangerous animals waiting. This set from 2020 just scratches the surface of how lighthouses can be built from LEGO bricks.



10

#### 9. 7739 COAST GUARD PATROL BOAT AND HEADQUARTERS

This entry is perhaps pushing the boundaries of what might be understood by 'lighthouse' and that's why it isn't any higher on this list. But what are lighthouses for? They guide master mariners as they approach the shore. This coast guard tower from 2008 does just that. The rocky outcrop uses a short-lived mould and the patrol boat is impressive. The tower itself is the most technologically advanced of all the lighthouses on this list, with a control station and first aid area – it's the perfect set to stage your own daring rescue on the high seas.



9

#### 8. 5770 LIGHTHOUSE ISLAND

This is a standard lighthouse build from 2011 and it does what it says on the box. There's red, there's white and it culminates with a light on the top to help fellow sea travellers. The small hut is cute but sparsely decorated and you can't help but think it'll be a lonely life for the dedicated worker who tends to the building. There's a fun detail with the seagull eating a fish and light bricks are always welcome, but other than that, this simple lighthouse hasn't aged all that well.



8

#### 7. 70431 THE LIGHTHOUSE OF DARKNESS

When there's an oxymoron in a set's title, you know it's going to be different. This seems to be a regular lighthouse that has been built precariously on the rock front in Grimsmouth Cove. However, the building has been possessed and small changes to the lighthouse reveal this to be a fearsome monster! Unfortunately the execution of that alternative look is a little disappointing and inside the building is pretty cramped. As a lighthouse, however, this 2020 set looks wonderful on display and is a reminder of how mysterious and eerie a lighthouse can be.



7

#### 6. 41094 HEARTLAKE LIGHTHOUSE

When you go to the seaside, you often want some ice cream – a fact that savvy businesswoman Kate recognised when she set up her ice cream parlour next to the Heartlake Lighthouse. Released in 2015, the lighthouse has the colour scheme of the yummiest raspberry ripple ice cream, which is complemented by the two-toned blue colouring of the adjoining house. Inside the lighthouse there's a useful toilet for patrons of the parlour, an amenity that this theme is known for. You can sit and devour your ice cream as the waves lightly lap underneath the jetty, making this an idyllic place to visit.



6



### 5. 31051 LIGHTHOUSE POINT

There's a bit more character to 2016's Lighthouse Point than 5700 Lighthouse Island, the other Creator set on this list. This set feels cosier and more relaxed, in part because the lighthouse is presented as a place to go on holiday. The brick built animals (the seagulls from 5700 returns, plus there's an orca whale that's full of cheeky character) are also brilliant. This is just a lighter, brighter set than its predecessor, with a charming turquoise cottage alongside the traditionally-coloured lighthouse – it would no doubt have a brilliant rating on Tripadvisor.



5

### 3. 70594 THE LIGHTHOUSE SIEGE

Many of the lighthouses on this list use the same red and white colour scheme, but 2016's 70594 The Lighthouse Siege is one of the most distinctive builds, in part because of its Eastern inspired design. Some of the other lighthouse builds have been tall and elegant buildings – this time, however, the lighthouse feels staunchly built into the earth. The set is chock full of details, including hidden traps and a charming post box, and has features aplenty that allow it to become the setting of an epic battle against the Sky Pirates.



3



1

### 4. 75903 THE HAUNTED LIGHTHOUSE

Zoinks! What's perhaps the most charming thing about this 2015 set is that it combines the traditional lighthouse aesthetic with a slightly more cartoonish presentation – the golden-toothed skull design that's built into the rock underneath the building is particularly effective. The bright lime green speedboat is a lovely addition, but it doesn't quite make up for the sparse interior of the lighthouse. The top of the build is particularly effective – it's a large, open balcony that's perfect for looking out into the sea, although beware the Lighthouse Keeper and Swamp Monster who roam the building.



4

### 2. 4194 WHITECAP BAY

Once more, a lighthouse becomes the location for a fight, this time between pirates and mermaids. There's the typical light brick that has been seen in so many of these sets, but what's unusual here is that a play feature allows the top half of the lighthouse to be blown apart. This 2011 playset looks brilliant – a sturdy fortification against any invading groups – with so many features it'll keep any young pirate occupied for a while. The added canon, which is to be used to capture the mermaids, works incredibly well and there's a lot to be said for this distinctive lighthouse.



2

### 1. 41380 LIGHTHOUSE RESCUE CENTRE

Four years after 41094 Heartlake House, 41380 Lighthouse Rescue Centre was released in 2019 and built upon the Friends style lighthouse look in every way. Again, there's a side building attached to the lighthouse, but this time it's a marine life rescue centre that's full of the necessary equipment to help save the creatures from the deep. The inside of the lighthouse has been transformed so that it's part of the wildlife protection centre – particularly worth noting is the TV room that's not for the workers but for the animals themselves. This is an attractive and fun set that shines brightest as the best LEGO lighthouse so far.



KAT REES-JAUKE

# KEEPING THE MINIFIGURES IN BALANCE

Kat wonders if licensed LEGO sets are putting minifigures before everything else

**M**INIFIGURES BRING CHARACTER and play opportunities to LEGO sets, and in many cases a certain amount of exclusivity. I will wholeheartedly admit that I have an obsession with minifigures and have made many LEGO purchases specifically for certain ones. I wanted 75170 The Phantom for Grand Admiral Thrawn (even with the incorrect rank badge), 75158 Rebel Combat Frigate for Ahsoka Tano and 76185 Spider-Man at the Sanctum Workshop for the new version of Doctor Strange. However, I've noticed there has been a run of sets that are all about the minifigures and not so much the actual model. Lacklustre builds or obscure source material are being paired with minifigures not available anywhere else.

Why do I think that some sets are all about the minifigures? My most recent build is a perfect example. 75335 Obi-Wan Kenobi vs. Darth Vader is a grey bit of plastic rock on display, with a few functions that certainly aren't mind blowing. However, it's currently the only way to get Tala Durith and NED-B as minifigures and it's highly likely to be the only set they'll ever appear in. As Obi-Wan Kenobi is a limited series on Disney+ there's slim chance the LEGO design team will return to the source material, especially with Andor now arriving on screens.

And the exact same thing happened for The Mandalorian. 75315 Imperial Light Cruiser is another triangular slab of grey in the LEGO Star Wars universe, but unlike its Star Destroyer predecessors it lacks much of an interior. But it does come with an exclusive Moff Gideon and is the only place to find Fennec Shand in her bounty hunting helmet. Now, I've got no problem with LEGO sets including exclusive minifigures. My issue is that the sets they're coming in aren't what they used to be.

Take 75158 Rebel Combat Frigate from 2016. It had some colourful splashes of tiles to denote its Rebel status, quite a detailed interior, and the ubiquitous stud-shooters when swooshing around the galaxy. It's a really good set depicting a key ship from Season 3 of Rebels, before even considering unique versions of Commander Sato and Ahsoka. The build was the highlight and the minifigures just a bonus. It had a decent amount of screen time too, unlike 75323 The Justifier, which seems like an



**KAT REES-JAUKE**

Part of the Blocks review team, Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets.

excuse to sell a Cad Bane minifigure expensively.

You may think I'm just having a rant about the Star Wars theme, and while it does seem to have the most obvious instances, it is not the only guilty party. For a recent Blocks review (coming in Issue 97) I built 76401 Hogwarts Courtyard: Sirius's

**THERE HAS BEEN A RUN OF SETS THAT ARE ALL ABOUT THE MINIFIGURES AND NOT SO MUCH THE ACTUAL MODEL**

Rescue. Like the title of the set suggests, it's an empty bit of courtyard and an uninspiring part of Hogwarts to recreate. It has a new Buckbeak though, and who can resist the heroic Hippogriff? Many of the Hogwarts sets use this tactic, so fans will expand their castle collection deliberately to get minifigures or three-headed dogs.

Exclusivity being used as a marketing tactic is not necessarily a bad thing, I just wish the models were still as good as the minifigures. Of course I could buy the minifigures separately from reselling websites, but the unique nature of the ones I'm after means they can have high values, in which

case I may as well get all the LEGO bricks as well for a little more money. Plus, it doesn't affect every theme and there is one that's hit a sweet spot and which I think LEGO Star Wars especially could learn from – LEGO Marvel.

We're over halfway through 2022 and my favourite set of the year so far is 76208 The Goat Boat. I came for the minifigures but stayed for a positively brilliant build. Never would I have expected to find such an accurate Viking longship in a Super Heroes set, with fascinating techniques and superb detailing (before adding the various Thor related stickers). Most Marvel sets I've built have been the same way, finding a great balance between interesting builds and a cast of fantastic minifigures.

Minifigures complement LEGO sets (unless it's a battle pack or Collectible Minifigures) and a model should be interesting before adding the figures. If I were to take away Obi Wan and Tala from 75335 then I'd just be left with a greyish puddle. Compare this to the Goat Boat, where removing Thor would leave me with a pretty cool ship just begging for a Viking horde. While I can tolerate exclusivity, it depends how good the model is – and many licensed sets feel like overpriced excuses to provide a certain character. My love of the minifigure remains strong – all I ask is that they come with a high-quality build. ■

The Sanctum Workshop has some great minifigures.



The real  
heroes of  
Kenobi.



It's the  
Mighty Thor!



Some of Kat's  
favourite  
exclusive  
minifigures.



Who can resist a  
Hippogriff?



GRAHAM HANCOCK

# FAN MEDIA DAYS IN REAL LIFE

Graham looks forward to a tradition returning after two years of doing Fan Media Days virtually

**B**Y THE TIME you read this, LEGO Fan Media Days 2022 will have wrapped up. If something shocking, scandalous and salacious has happened that you have already read about online, then this won't have aged well. If that's the case, then this will at least serve as a time capsule of a time when I approached these events with wide-eyed innocence.

Fan Media Days may be a phrase you're familiar with and you may not even be sure why. You may have read it in the pages of this very magazine, on your favourite blog or heard it spoken by a YouTube presenter. It's an initiative that started in 2016 to bring some of the media outlets that the LEGO Group works with to Billund to hear presentations, take tours, conduct interviews and network.

It's an exciting occasion that typically takes place in May, but this time has been moved to September. The event has varied over the years, typically it's three days but this time it's only two – like most things in life, it changes and evolves over time.

I am particularly looking forward to this one as it's the first time the event has been in person since 2019. Getting together with people who are working on other projects – whether that's the invaluable tool that is Brickset, the photography powerhouse that is Stuck in Plastic or the video master that is Zusammengebaut – is always the highlight of the trip.

No offence is meant to those working outside of Blocks, but the person I'm most looking forward to hanging out with is Daniel Konstanski – he and I are never on the same continent, yet we work together closely on this magazine, so getting to spend time with him will be fantastic. I promise we don't spend the entire time agreeing about how brilliant LEGO Pirates is...

There are other treats that make up the experience, of course. Employees from across the LEGO Group give presentations about what they are working on and members of the LEGO design department make time for interviews.

For as much as the event is enjoyable, it's also extremely hard work ('hard work' by journalistic standards, we're not miners or anything). While



**GRAHAM HANCOCK**

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.

some outlets might only cover a slither of the LEGO experience, focusing perhaps on a specific theme or niche, Blocks magazine covers it all – so every minute of every day requires us to be switched on and attentive.

It's very much a first world problem, but the most intense day I ever had at Fan Media Days involved 11 interviews in a single day. I had been a journalist for a few years by that point, but it was still a real challenge. Every time you interview someone, you have to change up your approach to suit their personality. Every LEGO theme is different, so you have to prepare questions based on hugely varied topics. There's also the practical consideration that your voice doesn't always last out asking that many questions. Fortunately for energy levels there is the magic solution also known as coffee.

Do not read this as a complaint; a day in which you can conduct 11 interviews is a ridiculously productive one and provides material for many editions of a magazine. This is just a peek behind the curtain about the practicalities of some of these mysterious things that we get involved with.

Another practicality is that of the presentations we get to hear at Fan Media Days. Some LEGO fans are under the impression

that the LEGO Group shows us very upcoming product for the next three years – I can guarantee that isn't the case! Presentation day is typically initiatives that the company wants to share with us, sometimes before they are announced more widely, sometimes things that are already public.

These can really vary – from an introduction to a podcast, through a look at a new initiative from the LEGO Foundation to information about a soon to open attraction called LEGO House, there's no predicting what will come up. Figuring out how to best utilise these in the magazine is tricky – some will be perfect for a feature, some will relate to something else we're working on, some will need filing away for when they'll be relevant in the future. While listening to the talk, my mind is always whirring about what its place will be within these pages.

If anyone does look at what goes on at these events and thinks how thrilling it would be to attend, I would seriously recommend looking at the LEGO Inside Tour or perhaps Skærbæk Fan Weekend. From the perspective of a fan, Inside Tour probably offers a lot more meaningful, unique interactions with LEGO design professionals, while Skærbæk Fan Weekend offers designer presentations and lots of chances for shooting the breeze with fellow AFOLs. Either of these would be a better experience for a fan than Fan Media Days.

As much as I am looking forward to Fan Media Days, I know I will be exhausted by the end of it and will return to my desk with a long to-do list – it's much more than a jolly and I wouldn't have it any other way. ■

**Graham at the first Fan Media Days in 2016.**





The Fan Media  
Days class  
of 2017.



Spending time  
with the other  
participants  
is always a  
highlight.



Friends  
designers  
discuss  
their work.





DANIEL KONSTANSKI

# COULD THE LEGO GROUP SURVIVE WITHOUT STAR WARS?

Daniel wonders if children not falling in love with the galaxy far, far away spells trouble for the LEGO Group

**DISTINCTLY REMEMBER** hearing about LEGO Star Wars for the first time. My dad had graciously subscribed to the LEGO Group's new email newsletter (it was a lot harder back then to have an email account so I didn't have a personal one) and informed me that he had seen the announcement. My excitement could barely be contained. For years I had built my own – very crude – X-wings and Millennium Falcons. Now there would be a chance to own the real thing. Fast forward a few years from that announcement and the pairing of Star Wars and BIONICLE would be responsible for saving the LEGO Group from bankruptcy.

Unfortunately, times change, and Star Wars has recently lost some of its lustre. Love them or hate them, the sequel trilogy of films has not launched the rabid new young fanbase that Disney was hoping for, nor has it reinvigorated adult collectors. The breadth of toys and corresponding sales of licensed Star Wars products has not come close to the dizzying heights of 2015. LEGO sets from the sequel trilogy and shows not called The Mandalorian have failed to impress even as masterpieces like 75290 Mos Eisley Cantina from the original trilogy are devoured by adult collectors.

Therein is the danger though. If a new generation of children are not catching the Star Wars viewing and collecting bug, sales will continue to drop, with those that do happen relying more and more heavily on an ageing contingent of long-time fans. I enthusiastically



**DANIEL KONSTANSKI**

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

passed Star Wars on to my own children and while I am sure they will watch it with my eventual grandchildren, the three young Konstanskis have not been sucked in anywhere

## THIS IS NOT THE EARLY 2000S

close to as thoroughly as I was by their age. While the cause can be debated (lower quality movies, more competition for attention, ever more seductive video games...), this story seems to be playing out across the board. What does it mean then for the LEGO Group if one of its biggest and most consistent sellers of the last two decades, which once saved the company, loses its lustre?

Thankfully, the answer as far as I can tell is not too much. This is not the early 2000s when a successful product line suddenly slumping could bring the LEGO Group to its knees. Since that time the company has engaged in a massive diversification effort. While there is no doubt that LEGO Star Wars has been immensely profitable over the last two decades, it is now surrounded and shored up

by multiple other successful themes. Stalwarts like City and Technic have enjoyed revitalised success for nearly as long as Star Wars. Newer evergreens like NINJAGO and Friends have proved they are here to stay and contribute profit without any licensing fees.

The company is also no longer dependent on one or two licenses that could lose popularity with a bad movie or two. Super Heroes, Jurassic World, Harry Potter and Minecraft have all proved they have staying power thanks to long running movie franchises. Furthermore, many one shots like Angry Birds, Minions and soon Avatar practically guarantee that the LEGO Group will profit off whatever the next big blockbuster is. Throw in Ideas and ICONS, with their tranche of nostalgic and one of a kind offers, and Billund can practically print money.

Thankfully, this bulwark against failure also does not appear to have bred complacency. Monkie Kid, Super Mario and Hidden Side are just a few recent examples in a long line of innovative products intended to open up or further cement markets. With so many new lines it doesn't matter if one or two of them fail; there will be something else to take its place and be more successful.

Dimensions is a perfect example of this phenomenon. The 'toys to life' game from a few years ago cost a fortune to develop and release, right as the genre began its rapid fade from public consciousness. With a whole final wave of toys never seeing the light of day, licensing costs for a host of third party IP and a whole new type of technology that had to be manufactured, the price tag for developing Dimensions must have been astronomical. Yet its quick demise barely seems to have had a ripple of impact on the LEGO Group's bottom line over those years thanks to revenues from all the other lines.

I feel very safe in saying that we are not in danger of repeating the year 2000. Furthermore, with the expansive slate of shows slotted for release in the coming years, Star Wars is hardly on its last legs. We can rest assured that even if it were to suddenly and abruptly flame out, the LEGO Group would be just fine thanks to its diversification. ■

In the early days, when Star Wars did well, the LEGO Group did well.



Recent shows  
haven't all  
captured the  
collective  
imagination.



The LEGO Group  
is a lot more  
diversified now  
than it used to be.





# PUTTING THE TECH IN TECHNIC

In the 1990s, Bjarne P Tveskov enhanced the experience of building a Technic submarine with the first ever LEGO CD-ROM

**Words:** Graham Hancock

**Pics:** The LEGO Group, Bjarne P Tveskov, Brickset







**T**ODAY YOU CAN open up your phone and pull up digital building instructions for any modern LEGO set. New experiences like Super Mario, City Missions and VIDIYO integrate digital offerings with physical products in an effort to provide children with 'fluid play'. Back in the 1990s though, a LEGO set had no connection with the digital world at all.

That all changed with the launch of 8299 Search Sub in 1997, the first LEGO set to come with a screen-based component. A CD-ROM was attached to the outside of the box, offering building instructions along with other interactive elements.

Getting to the point of releasing a LEGO CD-ROM took some time though. In the late 1980s, Bjarne P Tveskov had the dream job; he was designing LEGO sets in Billund, Denmark. When he wasn't immersed in the worlds of Futuron, Space Police and Blacktron though, he was playing with technology like the Sinclair Research ZX81 and Spectrum home computers.

Thanks to that personal interest in technology, Bjarne was always curious about what was going on elsewhere in the LEGO Group. 'They were already doing some of the educational stuff and were already a corporate sponsor at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). I knew some of those guys, I got to be quite good friends with Bo Nielsen, who was the only guy working on consumer facing digital stuff.'

It was in 1990 that Bjarne made the move to working in the technology side of the LEGO Group. Much of his time in the early days was spent evangelising about the possibilities that digital could offer the company.

'The LEGO Group knew that games and computers were becoming a competitor for children's time. It's about how much time is available and everything else struggles for that limited time. A few people could see that maybe it was something for LEGO, but it was also very far from the core business. It was very alien to most people both in marketing and design.'

As well as trying to alert the company to the opportunities that technology offered, Bjarne and Bo were developing concepts for potential experiences. 'Every year we would show all these things that LEGO could do with digital. Bo Nielsen was a game designer on the old Commodore 64. He made some demos of a LEGO Castle

game and people thought, "why would LEGO ever do something crazy like that?" It just took another 15 years. But that's how it is. Sometimes it's frustrating being too early, I think all people in tech know that. There are no awards for being too early.'

One of the prototypes that Bjarne had created was for on-screen building instructions. For the example, he had taken a small Space model and created animated steps that showed how to build it. By pure chance, a manager arrived early for a meeting one day and took a look at the demo.

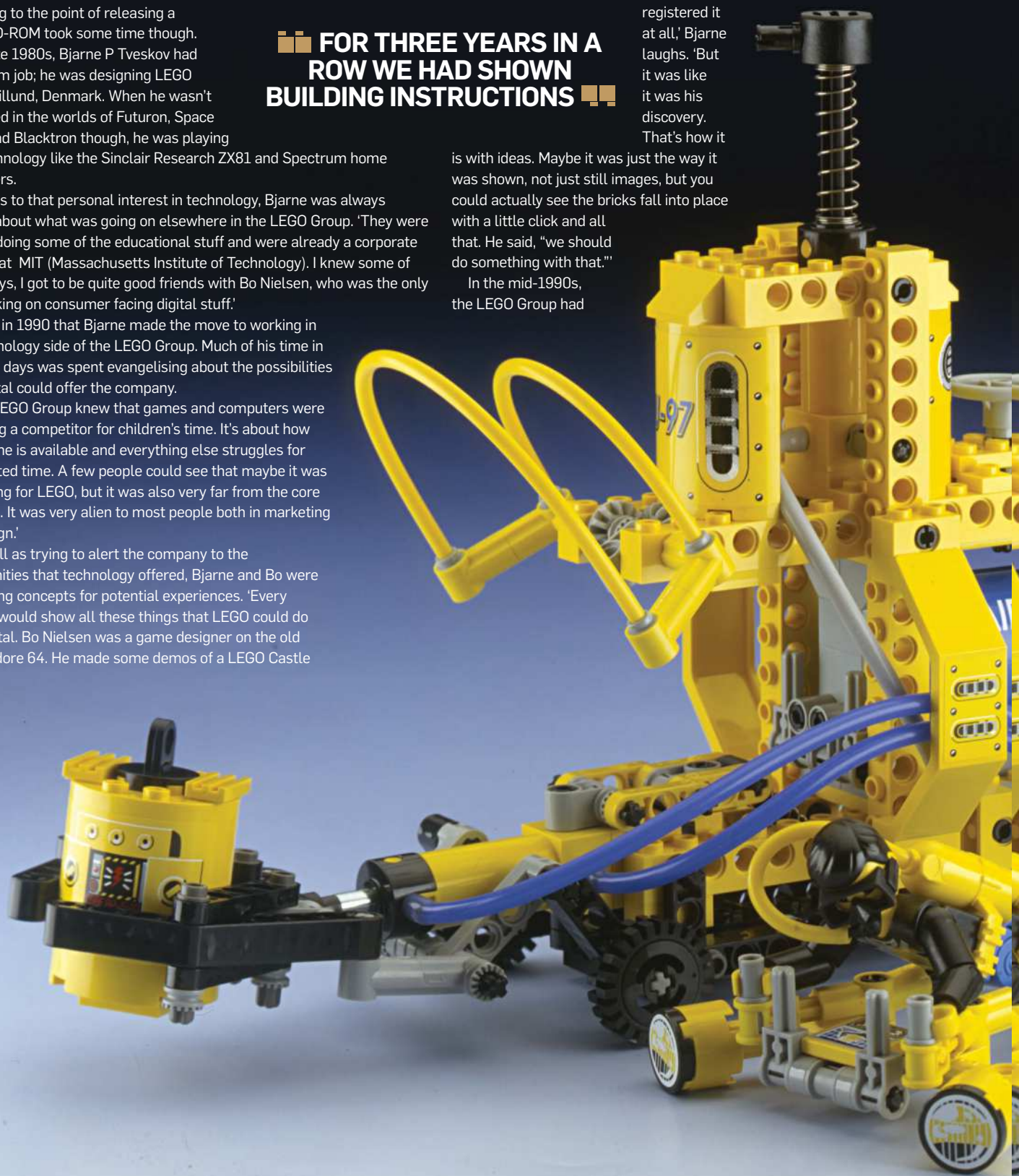
'The irony is that I'm sure for three years in a row we had shown building instructions on screen and no-one had

registered it at all,' Bjarne laughs. 'But it was like it was his discovery. That's how it

is with ideas. Maybe it was just the way it was shown, not just still images, but you could actually see the bricks fall into place with a little click and all that. He said, "we should do something with that."

In the mid-1990s, the LEGO Group had

## ■ ■ ■ FOR THREE YEARS IN A ROW WE HAD SHOWN BUILDING INSTRUCTIONS ■ ■ ■



started to take digitalisation seriously, with a huge investment behind it. SPU Darwin was a special area of the company set up with the goal of delivering the ambitious plan to create the entire LEGO System digitally, which could underpin other projects. Departments within Darwin were responsible for exploring digital building instructions, video games and general R&D in digital technologies.

Suddenly, after years of tests, prototypes and explorations, Bjarne could execute a project – with the code name 'Rubber Duck'. 'We had to create a CD-ROM for LEGO Technic, a test launch just to see if this could be a thing. With little pilot launches the risk is lower.'

But this was an occasion when the marketing teams were paying attention and all wanted the disc for their own regions. 'It became more like a full launch title for 1997, just by accident.'

Suddenly, what Bjarne was producing was no longer a small test for select markets, 8299 Search Sub – also known as Nautilus – would come with a CD-ROM around the world.

8299 was a 383-piece set that built a yellow submarine and the CD-ROM was not the only first. It was also the first time a Technic model included the pneumatic air tank to execute the model's function. This was still in the era when tall figures were included with Technic sets, with the diver exclusive to this box.

To make sure that consumers saw this as a modern, cutting-edge LEGO set, the CD-ROM was attached to the outside of the box. 'This was also for practical reasons, because then we could work on the software a lot

longer than if it were packed inside with the set. It became the most stolen CD-ROM in Europe because people were ripping it off boxes in the stores. We got a lot of design awards and stuff but I think the proudest thing is being the most stolen CD-ROM – that was pretty cool.'

At the time, the CD-ROM was ground-breaking. An animated introduction with dramatic music sees the submarine travelling through the water towards a sea base, where it docks and the video gives way to the interactive user experience. That might not sound like much today, but back then it was unusual to even see LEGO sets animated.

While the headline was that the disc included the building instructions

digitally for the first time, there was much more to the experience than that.

'We tried to do a bit of everything on it; have the building instructions, but also

have some inspirational material showing

the models underwater and some nice little 3D animations.

'We had building tips and tricks... that's something we're still trying to crack today – how to teach kids how to build with LEGO Technic. It's not easy, I still haven't really figured out how to build with Technic. We had all these extra little mini models that contain building techniques, trying to show them in an animated way and so on.

'This was also to get a sense of what would stick with the kids. We did some testing afterwards. It's always hard to catch these learnings, it's always like starting from scratch, then other people start anew, like two years later, when it's all forgotten again. But we did some of these early things with the intention of learning from them.'

## ■ IT BECAME THE MOST STOLEN CD-ROM IN EUROPE ■



The model that the disc came with.



The CD-ROM was used as a selling point.



Producer and Concept Developer Bjarne P Tveskov.



Getting the project completed was extremely challenging. 'There were so many so many unknowns. How do we even produce a CD-ROM? Who's going to do the graphics? What's going to be the logistics behind it? Who's going to proofread instructions on a CD-ROM? We didn't have any structure for any of that stuff.'

'We had a very dedicated internal team working around the clock to create all the content. At the same time we were working with several external vendors; a company called Yav in Holland doing the coding and compression of all the animation, concept consultants in Aarhus from The Planet, Networkers, an interactive agency in Copenhagen plus several internal and external consultants doing various bits of the project. It was a lot to handle, but also fun and challenging to explore this new area for the LEGO Group.'

Modelling all of the bricks for the digital instructions was a gargantuan task. Every element was created in Softimage 2.6, a 3D graphics application – but then it turned out that the software could only render half of the LEGO model. The team had to start again in Alias PowerAnimator, a digital modelling tool that could handle getting the LEGO submarine built digitally.

'We had a deadline to ship the product and that's no joke at LEGO,' Bjarne explains. 'If you don't deliver on time, it's a real big hurdle because they can't ship that product – we're talking serious, serious damages. There was also a lot of pressure internally, because we were a new department and we wanted to show we could do it.'

That made it an extremely stressful period. 'We were hiring a lot at the same time as we were in production. You can imagine how much fun that was. I have never been that stressed in my life; I realised that I should never be a producer again because I'm a designer, a creative. On this I was both a concept person but also the person managing the whole thing.'

'I figured out what I didn't want to do with my life, for sure. I made a deal with myself never to become that stressed again. Stress is no joke, it is a pretty bad place to be, especially when it goes on and on and on, for like a

year or longer. But we managed to push it out the door. Of course, we were late, because software is always late. Luckily, you can do upgrades. After it was launched, with a new shipping of the product, we could upgrade the CD and fix some of the bugs.'

When the set was released, the CD-ROM was recognised for doing something genuinely unique and innovative. It won awards including the Danish Design Centre ID98 Prize, the Scandinavian Interactive Media Event's Best Scandinavian CD-ROM Award and I.D. Design Magazine's Design Distinction.

'People seemed to like it,' Bjarne recalls. 'It helped shape this grey area between physical and digital. This was just a mental link as there were no motors or anything in that product, but CyberMaster and Mindstorms followed shortly after.'

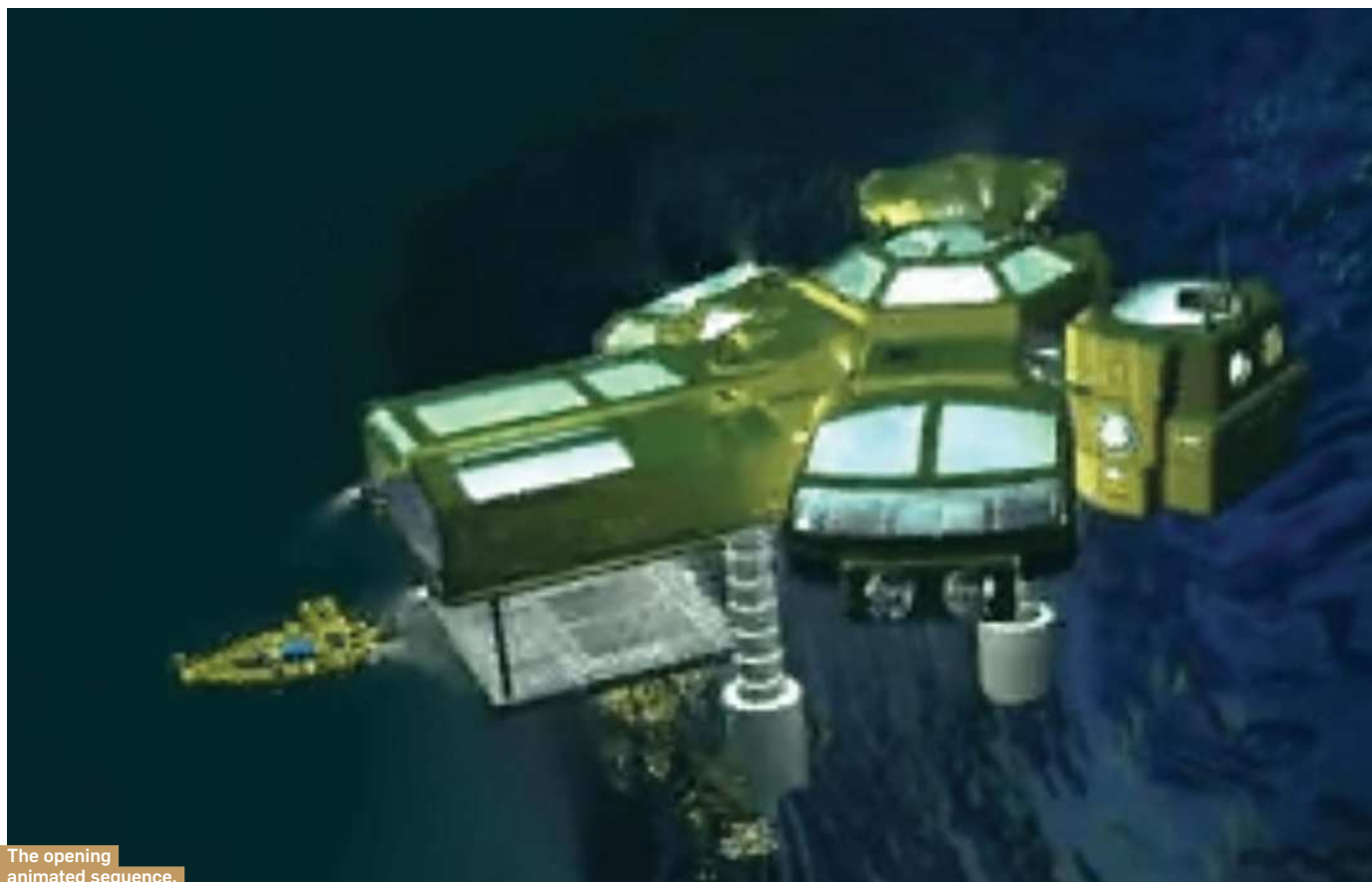
While those products were very different to the 8299 Search Sub CD-ROM, things that were determined in that first project influenced how these later experiences presented the LEGO

experience to users. 'We started to have some design language and way of thinking about how to bring kids through experiences on the screen. Just building from a screen was a pretty new thing. But if you look at what's done today, it's very similar. I think we hit it pretty well, the way we showed the steps.'

The following year, 8428 Concept Car came with a CD-ROM – but Bjarne wasn't involved with that one. That car would be the end of sets coming with discs if they didn't strictly need them. 'Focus goes elsewhere and it's hard to say how much it adds in terms of sales. It costs a lot of money to develop all of this content.'

While the first ever LEGO CD-ROM may not have led to software being provided with every single set, much of what it offered has been adopted since. Digital building instructions are here to stay and the LEGO Group is determined to find ways to combine physical and digital play. 8299 Search Sub proved that there was interest in these ideas 25 years ago and was the first step on a journey that continues today. ■

### ■ BUILDING FROM A SCREEN WAS A PRETTY NEW THING ■



The opening animated sequence.



The project planning room.



The LEGO team plans the instructions.



The 3D base before the interior was added.



Concept sketch by Bo Torstensen.



The digital recreation of the sub.



Digital building instructions.



The underwater base on the CD sleeve.



The CD-ROM was attached to the packaging.



# THE MINITALIA MYSTERY

Minitalia was a lower quality LEGO product released only in Italy – and dedicated fans are unravelling the story behind this 1970s oddity

**Words:** Daniel Konstanski and Francesco Spreafico **Pics:** Francesco Spreafico, Nicola Raimondi, the LEGO Group



This feature is based on the thorough research undertaken by Francesco Spreafico and Nicola Raimondi.



An assembled  
Minitalia model.  
© LEGO Idea  
House.



Several of the official  
LEGO Minitalia sets.  
© LEGO Idea House.



**THE 1950S THROUGH** the early 1970s are a time full of fascinating stories from the LEGO Group. This was an era before minifigures, when the company was still expanding, first across Europe, then America and Asia. There was a lot of experimentation, some of which we know very little about since enough years have gone by that those who were there at the time are no longer around.

Even the LEGO Group's archives can be frustratingly sparse when it comes to certain products and stories from these decades, which often means that dedicated fans have to play historian. Such has been the case with Minitalia, one of the most elusive and seemingly random product lines to have been produced by the LEGO Group during the 1970s. Minitalia products were only sold in Italy, which compounds the inconsistent record keeping.

## WHAT WAS MINITALIA?

There are several factors that make Minitalia so interesting to LEGO fans. First and foremost are its unique bricks; they are different from other LEGO elements produced concurrently. Many of them used different connectors. These included crosses and, later in their production, tubes with notches cut out of them on their undersides. Up top, the normal solid studs were swapped for a doughnut style that omitted the stylised LEGO logo. Some elements also featured thinner walls with sidebars sticking in. While a common technique in various bricks today, it was not standard practice back in the 1970s.

Not only were the connectors different, but the plastic used in their manufacturing was too. In lieu of the standard ABS formula something less uniform and robust was utilised. Though the exact material makeup is still unconfirmed, the general consensus is that it was High Impact Polystyrene (HIPS).

What makes all of this so fascinating is how much of a deviation from

## ■ CHEAPER PLASTIC CAUSED A REDUCED CLUTCH POWER WHEN COMPARED TO ABS BRICKS ■

the LEGO Group's normal practices Minitalia represents. The whole premise of the LEGO System in Play was, and is, re-using the same elements in different products to reduce manufacturing costs and release those toys in as many markets as possible. The company has prided itself on its quality from the earliest days. Both founder Ole Kirk Kristiansen and his son Godtfred enacted strategies that relied on beating the competition not by being cheaper, but by being better. Bricks that don't stay together annoy children, so this guiding light has served the company well.

Bearing in mind these practices, Minitalia makes no sense on the surface. It utilised unique bricks that would have required either modification of existing moulds or creation of new ones, both of which would have cost money and consumed valuable production time. The elements were used in a line of sets that had to be designed separately from the normal product line, which would go on to be sold in a single country, thereby eliminating any economy of scale in their production. Minitalia also goes against the LEGO Group's commitment to quality. Cheaper plastic caused a reduced clutch power when compared to ABS bricks. It's possible that the geometry of the pieces also

contributed to this. Crosses, hollow studs and tubes with slits all suggest that Minitalia elements could not achieve the tight tolerances of normal LEGO elements. Hollowed out studs are going to have a lot more give than a solid stud, so they will not grip as strongly.

Deepening the mystery further is that, contrary to a common rumour that has percolated within the fan community, regular LEGO sets were sold alongside Minitalia in Italy for the entirety of its run (which began in 1970, not 1971 as is often thought). This would only have further exacerbated the economies of scale problem, since some consumers who would have potentially bought a Minitalia set could pick up a normal LEGO product instead. So, what in the world was going on?



A selection of Minitalia boxes.



## DEBUNKING THE IMPORT BAN

For many years the leading theory within the fan community, which has even been repeated by the LEGO Group in certain instances, was that an Italian ban on imported toys existed during this time, so the company had to make its products within the confines of Italy. Since a whole new manufacturing line had to be set up, they did it on the cheap and made less expensive bricks. This story has since been thoroughly debunked but is still quite pervasive; it was even printed in Issue 90 of this magazine.

Devoted fans have researched Italian law from this time and can find no evidence of such a ban. Most likely this explanation came from mixing Minitalia's story with events from earlier in the LEGO Group's history. There were indeed import bans in the years directly after World War II, which played heavily into how the company expanded beyond Denmark. Minitalia, however, is not one of those stories.

Advertisements exist showing regular LEGO products and Minitalia side by side. If the LEGO Group couldn't import the regular line of LEGO toys into Italy, side by side adverts wouldn't have been printed. Children of factory workers from the 1970s have even shared memories passed down from their parents about at least some Minitalia bricks being manufactured in Denmark, which would then have been imported into Italy.

## LOW PRICED LEGO BRICKS

With a lack of conclusive information, all of the theories around why Minitalia was produced are indeed theories. They are based on the available evidence, but they must be treated as the best assumptions currently available rather than the definitive truth.

The closest thing to an explanation comes from an August 2014

comment on the Brickset forum by a user named peterlinddk from Denmark (it should be noted that his comments have not been verified). He claimed that both his parents worked for a plastics manufacturer in Kolding, a town in southern Denmark, where both regular LEGO bricks and Minitalia bricks were manufactured for the LEGO Group. He wrote:

'The story my dad remembers is that Italy wouldn't buy the expensive "luxury" toys produced by LEGO, so they produced some (somewhat) inferior products to sell in Italy, hoping to corner the market, and later replace it with regular LEGO products.'

On the surface this makes a lot of sense and may well be the correct explanation. But if the LEGO Group was willing to sacrifice the commitment to quality and invest a lot of money to do it, why not use

Minitalia bricks to corner other markets too? Surely Italy wasn't the only country whose citizens didn't want to pay high prices for a foreign made toy.

The common theory is that Italy was being used as a test case to see how

the market would respond to lower quality LEGO products. Perhaps this was an experiment that, if successful, would have led to an expansion of the Minitalia elements to other markets. Should this be the explanation, it can only be assumed that there was enough blowback or sales were so weak that the higher-ups in Billund were convinced that the experiment was not worth pursuing further.

## BEATING THE COMPETITION

There is another theory based on the premise that Minitalia showing up in Italy was no mere accident or experiment; it was an invasion. For years before Minitalia launched, Italy had boasted its own home-grown product line of buildable plastic bricks. In fact, the stories of the LEGO Group and

## THE THEORY IS THAT ITALY WAS BEING USED AS A TEST CASE



Original Minitalia packaging.

A glued Minitalia model built from OLO bricks.



# Chi ha coraggio di negare ancora Lego a un bambino?



**Lego è il gioco che cresce con lui e lo fa crescere.**



Il vostro bambino è sempre lì a chiedervi altro Lego. E' logico: lui cresce, e Lego cresce con lui. Giochi, costruzioni diverse, adatte ad ogni età, e ogni anno qualcosa di nuovo, di diverso.

ma sempre di qualità Lego. Forse vostro figlio ha iniziato da poco, con la prima scatola regalo. Una delle tante. Fatta apposta per chi deve incominciare.

Con tutti i pezzi che servono per tante costruzioni diverse,

dalle più semplici a

quella già un po'

più complesse. (Prezzi a

partire dalle 1.250 alle

14.000 lire). Poi, giorno

dopo giorno, ha chiesto

qualcosa di nuovo,

e Lego è

sempre stato

pronto a darglielo. Quest'anno,

ad esempio, è l'anno dei treni e

degli ingranaggi. L'anno del movimento. Tre diversi formati

di ingranaggi (Art. 800/801/802 prezzi da lire 1500). Facili da montare, solidi

e resistenti, come i normali mattoncini (non possiamo che farli così, visto che

i bambini mai si stufano di smontarli). Ingranaggi che danno vita

alle costruzioni più belle. Mulini a vento, elicotteri, camion e macchine di

ogni tipo, che si muovono azionate

da una semplice manovella, o, ancor

meglio, da un motore Lego.



Motori a pila, facili da usare anche per i più piccoli, e motori con trasformatore. E i treni Lego: l'altra grande novità di quest'anno. Magnifici, completi di tutto. Vagoncini con porte che si aprono, circuito di binari,

passaggi a livello, scambi da comandare a distanza. Avanti e indietro per un paesaggio tutto Lego. Trainati dalle velocissime locomotive elettriche a trasformatore da 12 volt. O da quelle a pila da 4,5 V. (a partire da lire 8.500). Treni, ingranaggi: le novità più grosse. Ma non le sole. Ci sono, ad esempio, le piccole costruzioni "di lusso" in stile italiano del nuovissimo

Lego Minitalia. Ricche di particolari. Porte e finestre che si

aprono, archetti,

staccati. Colori

magnifici. E prezzi molto bassi (4 confezioni da lire 600 a lire 2.200).

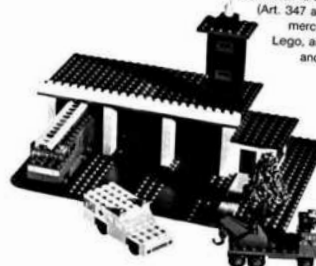
E ancora: la stazione dei pompieri con autopompa, ambulanza e carro gru

(Art. 347 a lire 3.500) e le automobili di Legoland, divertenti e a buon

mercato. Il vostro bambino è sempre lì a chiedervi

Lego, adesso che lo conoscete

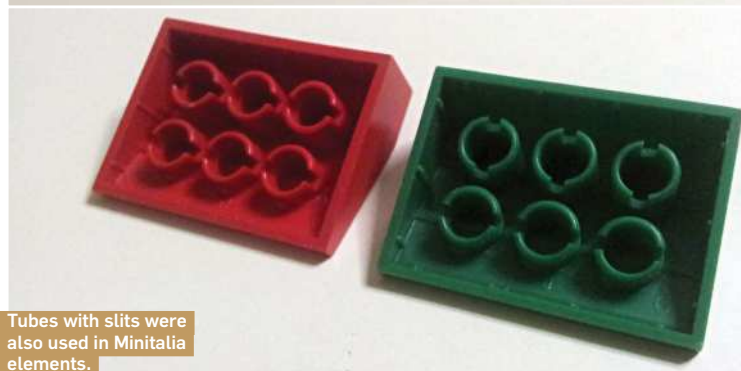
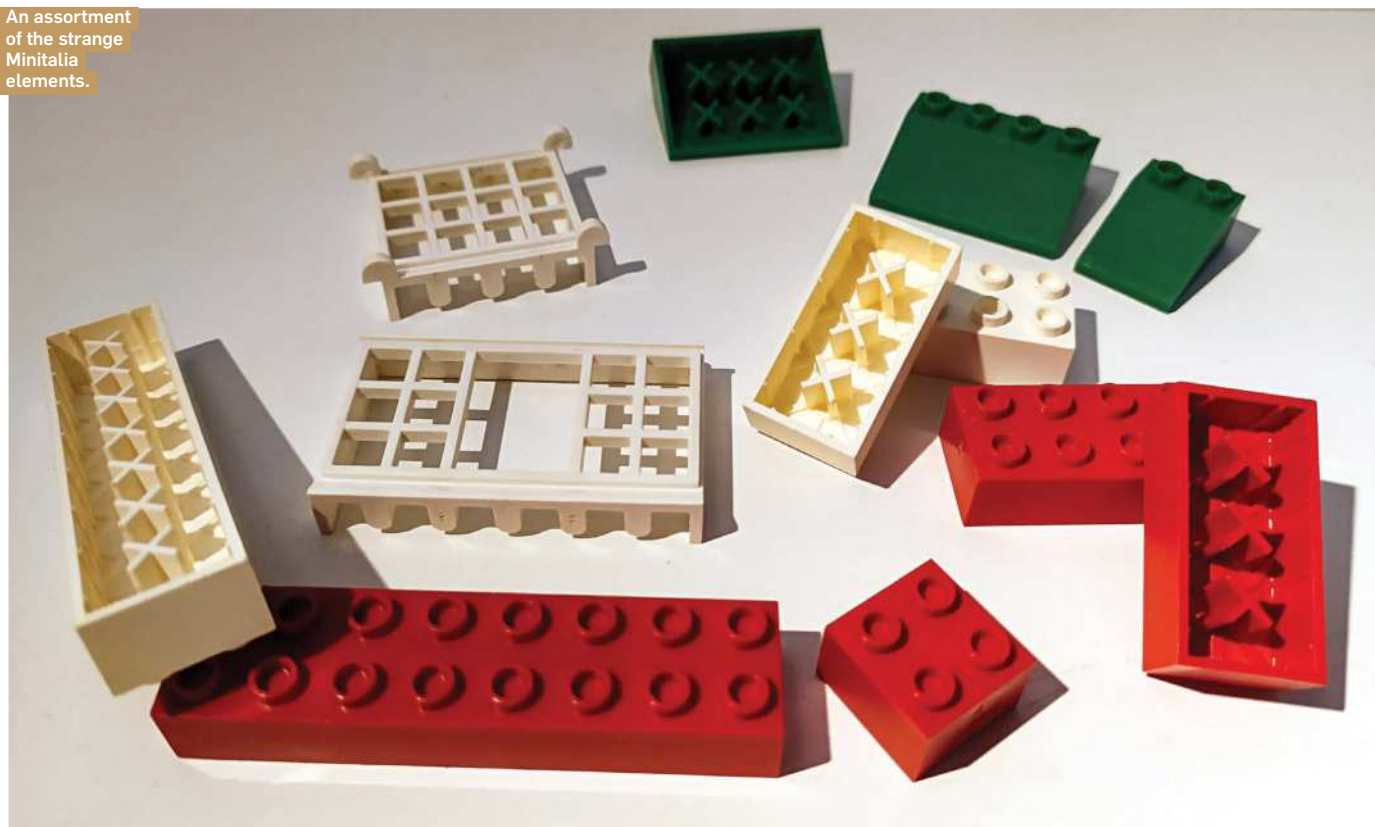
anche voi, capite perché.



An advert showing Minitalia alongside regular LEGO sets..

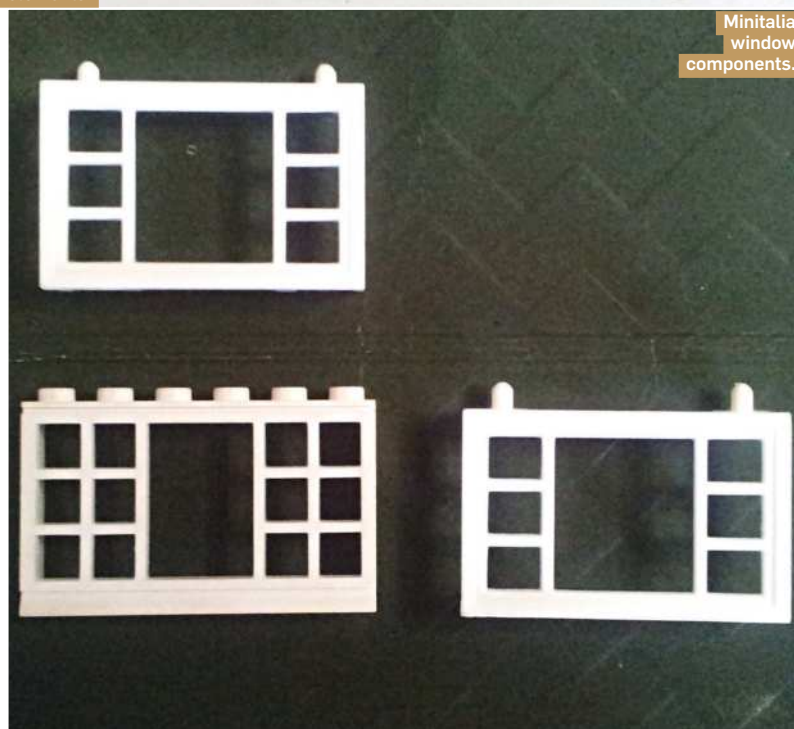
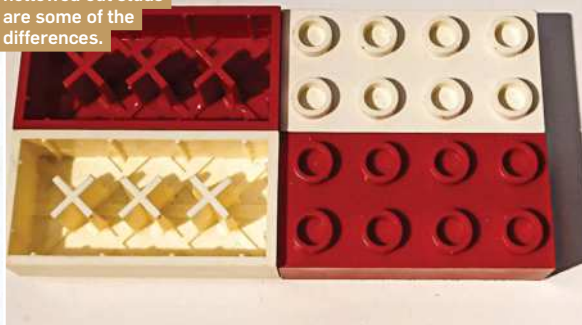


An assortment of the strange Minitalia elements.

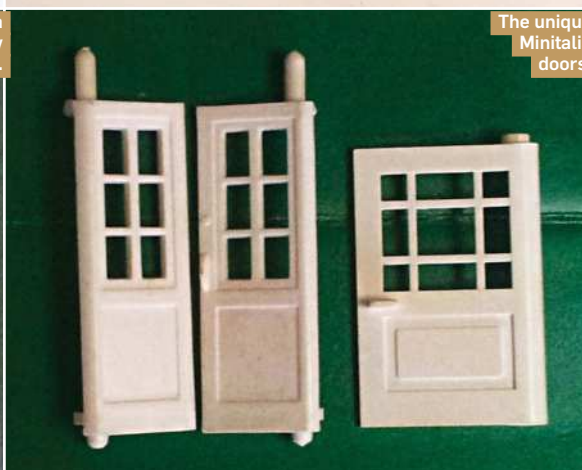


Tubes with slits were also used in Minitalia elements.

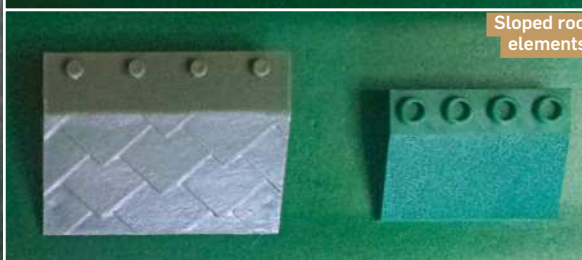
X shapes and hollowed out studs are some of the differences.



Minitalia window components.



The unique Minitalia doors.



Sloped roof elements.

Italo Cremona share some remarkable similarities.

Founded in 1922, this Italian company had begun producing items made from plastic in the years before World War II – giving it a head start on Ole Kirk Kristiansen. When war erupted, Italo Cremona was forced to divert and make toiletries until peace was declared, at which point it once again started making plastic products, most notably frames for glasses. Then, in 1960 Italo Cremona launched a line of toys called Plastic City that consisted of interlocking bricks similar in appearance, though not compatible with, LEGO pieces. Considering that the LEGO Group received an Italian patent in 1958, it is not a stretch to think that it could have inspired Italo Cremona's new line.

Italo Cremona presented multiple features that the LEGO Group would not offer for years. Plastic City included figures akin to Playmobil people to populate the buildable playscapes.

Themed sets were interspersed with parts packs and those sets covered subject matter that would later become LEGO themes such as space and medieval times, as well as a military line.

Most notably, Plastic City's range included licenses, one of which was Disney. In fact, if you're walking through Venice and see one of Donald Duck's nephews staring down at you from a window, that is in fact a Plastic City build rather than a LEGO model (it has been there for decades, the location used to be a toy shop). There was no question as to which company had the better product; LEGO elements were far superior. But did that really matter when Italo Cremona had Mickey Mouse? It is not difficult to imagine that, in the halls of Billund headquarters, a rival company with its own, non-compatible, building system with lucrative licenses in a nearby European country might have been viewed as a real threat.

In light of this it seems possible that Minitalia was released to compete with and undercut Italo Cremona in its home territory. While Minitalia is not the only instance of alternate bricks being used in LEGO products, given that there are known examples in Japan called OLO bricks, nothing

comes close to the scope of what happened in Italy. Throughout the early and mid-1970s over 20 Minitalia sets were released across two major waves. Nothing approaching that has ever happened anywhere else in the world. Such specificity suggests a deep level of intent.

Dovetailing with this, Minitalia sets bear what can only be described as an uncanny resemblance to several Plastic City sets. Multiple models from Italo Cremona's line feature a red and green colour palette with window styles that will look very familiar to anyone with even a passing knowledge of Minitalia's aesthetic. An uninformed buyer could have easily mistook one for the other.

Finally, in another eerie similarity to the LEGO story, Italo Cremona experienced a major fire in its factory in 1974 that decimated production. The company never recovered and began a downward slide, disappearing

from the public consciousness by the 1990s. Though the fire was coincidental, it seems possible that reviving Plastic City production would not have been worth the investment for Italo Cremona with the LEGO Group competing so fiercely.

## MINITALIA SETS BEAR AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO SEVERAL PLASTIC CITY SETS

### THE MINITALIA MYSTERY

This all remains a mystery. While it definitely wasn't an import ban on foreign goods that led to Minitalia being introduced in Italy, it could have been the LEGO Group testing out a lower quality offering at a lower price point or it could have been the company's determination to beat a competitor. It could have been a combination of both. Without official documentation from the era being available though, these theories remain just that.

Whatever the full story of Minitalia is, the theme is a fascinating example of a rare occasion when the LEGO Group moved away from its typical practices and tried something different. As long as dedicated fans remain curious about the LEGO Group's history, information about this oddity will continue to come to light. ■

Minitalia was all about red buildings with green roofs.





# LICENSED VS HOMEGROWN LEGO THEMES

Blocks magazine analyses the LEGO Group's shift from focusing on original product lines to licensed properties over the past 20 years

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski





Non-licensed and licensed themes have been duking it out for more than two decades.



The LEGO Group explored Vikings many times before releasing the theme.



NINJAGO has covered a lot of ground since it was introduced.

**I**N THE 44 years since 1978, the LEGO System portfolio has gone from Town, Castle and Space – all 100% homegrown originals – to a seemingly endless litany of new licensed sets. How did the LEGO Group go from producing just a few in-house product lines to licensing some of the world's best known characters? And are there really so many more licensed themes than there used to be?

This story begins in earnest in 2000. A confluence of events came together in that fluid time that began to shake and alter the very foundations on which the LEGO Group had rested for decades. The first year of sales numbers for the company's inaugural foray into licensing, LEGO Star Wars, had come back better than anyone could have imagined. The LEGO Group had dabbled with small licensing deals before, mostly for promotional products, but nothing had ever come close to the scale and breadth of LEGO Star Wars.

The news on other fronts was not so rosy. Fear had been building for years that video games and other forms of childhood entertainment would

## SPORTS, HARRY POTTER AND STUDIOS ALL ENDED ABRUPTLY

push the comparatively analogue brick into irrelevance. That fear had already led to some experimentation in the previous decade.

In 2000, the LEGO Group introduced more licensed themes; one was Sports – with tie-ins to real world teams and players, another was Studios, in partnership with Steven Spielberg – it allowed children to shoot and edit video of scenes built from bricks.

Concurrently, a new Space faction was not introduced, leaving room for two new themes carved out of what had previously been subthemes

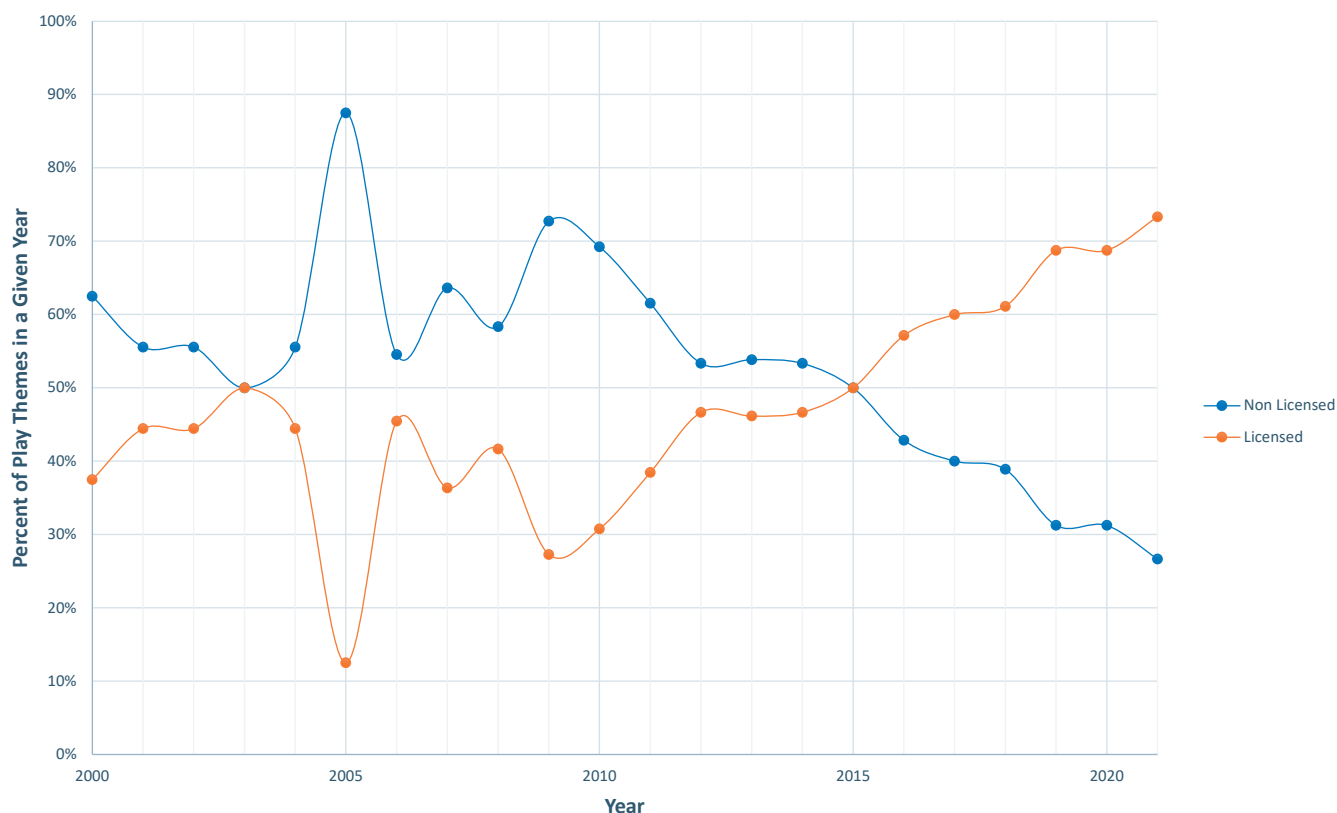
**YEAR: 2000**  
**TOTAL PLAY THEMES:**  
**NON-LICENSED = 63%**  
**LICENSED = 37%**

of Town – Racers and Arctic. Castle and Town released new sets, but the traditional core themes were outnumbered by other offerings; Space and Pirates had no new releases, but Adventurers continued with Dino Island. The proportion of the play themes split between non-licensed and licensed product lines was approximately 60/40.

Experimentation continued for the next several years and little of it was profitable. In 2005, the balance of non-licensed and licensed themes swung wildly back from nearly 50/50 the previous few years to an astounding 90/10, with only Star Wars surviving the great purge. Sports, Harry Potter and Studios (which by this time had expanded to include Spider-Man and Jurassic Park III) all ended abruptly. It is not hard to see what the LEGO Group was doing. Having been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy in 2004, the company cleared the decks.

Everything that wasn't profitable was purged and even lines that were making money received scrutiny. Homegrown themes don't involve any licensing fees, so there's potentially more profit for the LEGO Group. The company went back to its roots, trying to go it alone with predominantly original play themes. For almost the next decade a string of 'in and out' themes were released. Based on extensive market research, these lines came in for a year or two before being replaced by something else, with the intention of keeping the product portfolio feeling fresh and novel. Between 2005 and 2011, 12 in-house in and out play themes were released.

Non-Licensed vs. Licensed Percentages by Year





Licensing continued during this time but it followed a similar pattern to the in and out themes – after struggling to sell Star Wars and Harry Potter in non-movie years, the LEGO Group sought to make a big splash when a film was out and then move on quickly. These included action-adventure films like Indiana Jones, Prince of Persia and Pirates of the Caribbean. The ratio of non-licensed and licensed themes vacillated between 60/40 and 50/50 in any given year, with the exception of 2009. Only Indiana Jones and SpongeBob Squarepants joined Star Wars on team licensing, making the split 73/27 in favour of homegrown themes. It wasn't a lasting change and would actually prove the beginning of the end.

**YEAR: 2009**  
**TOTAL PLAY THEMES:**  
**NON-LICENSED = 73%**  
**LICENSED = 27%**

As the 2010s closed, the story seemed to be that the LEGO Group could make original play themes and supplement those with a few licensed offerings based on whatever film or television property was a good fit each year.

There was change on the cards though – when Iron Man became a smash-hit in 2008, it kicked off what would become the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and with it a consolidation within the entertainment industry around huge, long-lasting franchises that could be repositioned as brands.

The way people consumed entertainment was also changed by the iPhone and then the iPad in 2010. Those devices ushered in the mobile era of video consumption during which, almost overnight, gatekeepers vanished. Whereas before children had to tune in at a specific time and on a specific channel to view favourite shows, they were suddenly able to, along with parents, be their own programmers. Any show could be

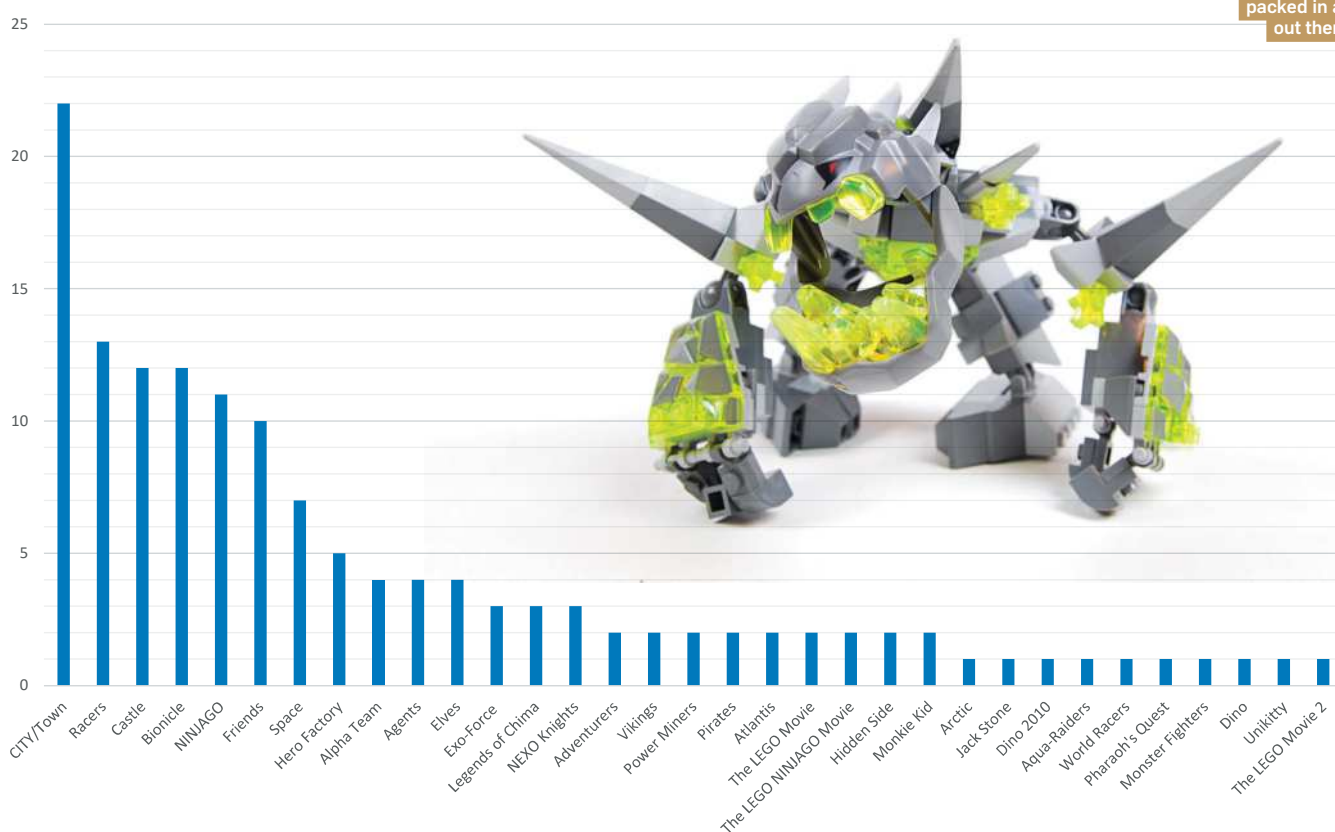
watched at any time, commercial free. Whereas for decades toy makers had been able to know when and where children would be watching, they were suddenly left completely in the dark. The days of being able to count on children being planted in front of televisions for several hours during given blocks of time were over. Commercials couldn't be relied upon to keep a company's products in the forefront of children's notoriously short memories, which is crucial because most toys have to be requested at Christmas time.

## THE LEGO GROUP SOUGHT TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH WHEN A FILM WAS OUT AND THEN MOVE ON QUICKLY



Number of Years Active Since 2000 - Non-Licensed

Power Miners was another action-packed in and out theme.

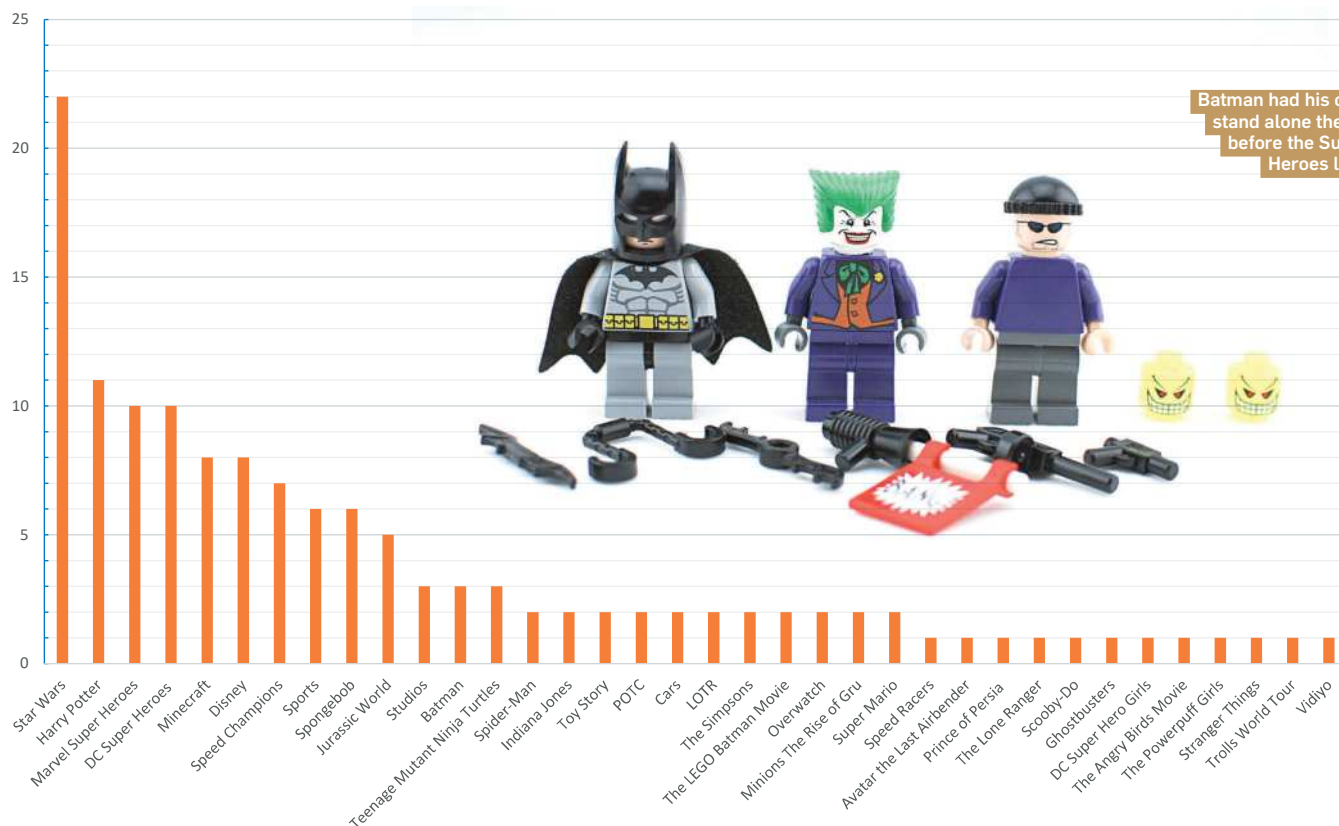


NEXO KNIGHTS was a homegrown theme that lasted for a few years.



Throughout the toy industry, companies turned to the same answer for solving this conundrum – moving more extensively to big, licensed franchises to drive sales. The concept was that in lieu of slick commercials, franchises through sheer ubiquity would keep products on the minds of children.

Number of Years Active Since 2000 - Licensed



Batman had his own stand alone theme before the Super Heroes line.



Star Wars is the longest running licensed theme.







Dino Attack was one of the earliest homegrown in and out themes.



Many Disney characters have been turned into LEGO figures.



Speed Champions has licensed numerous real-world cars and brands.



One of the most surprising licensed themes was Angry Birds.



NINJAGO has been a homegrown success story.

## EVERGREEN THEMES

A theme that has had new releases every year since 2015

### NON-LICENSED EVERGREEN THEMES

1. City
2. Friends
3. NINJAGO

### LICENSED EVERGREEN THEMES

1. Star Wars
2. Marvel Super Heroes
3. DC Super Heroes
4. Minecraft
5. Disney
6. Speed Champions

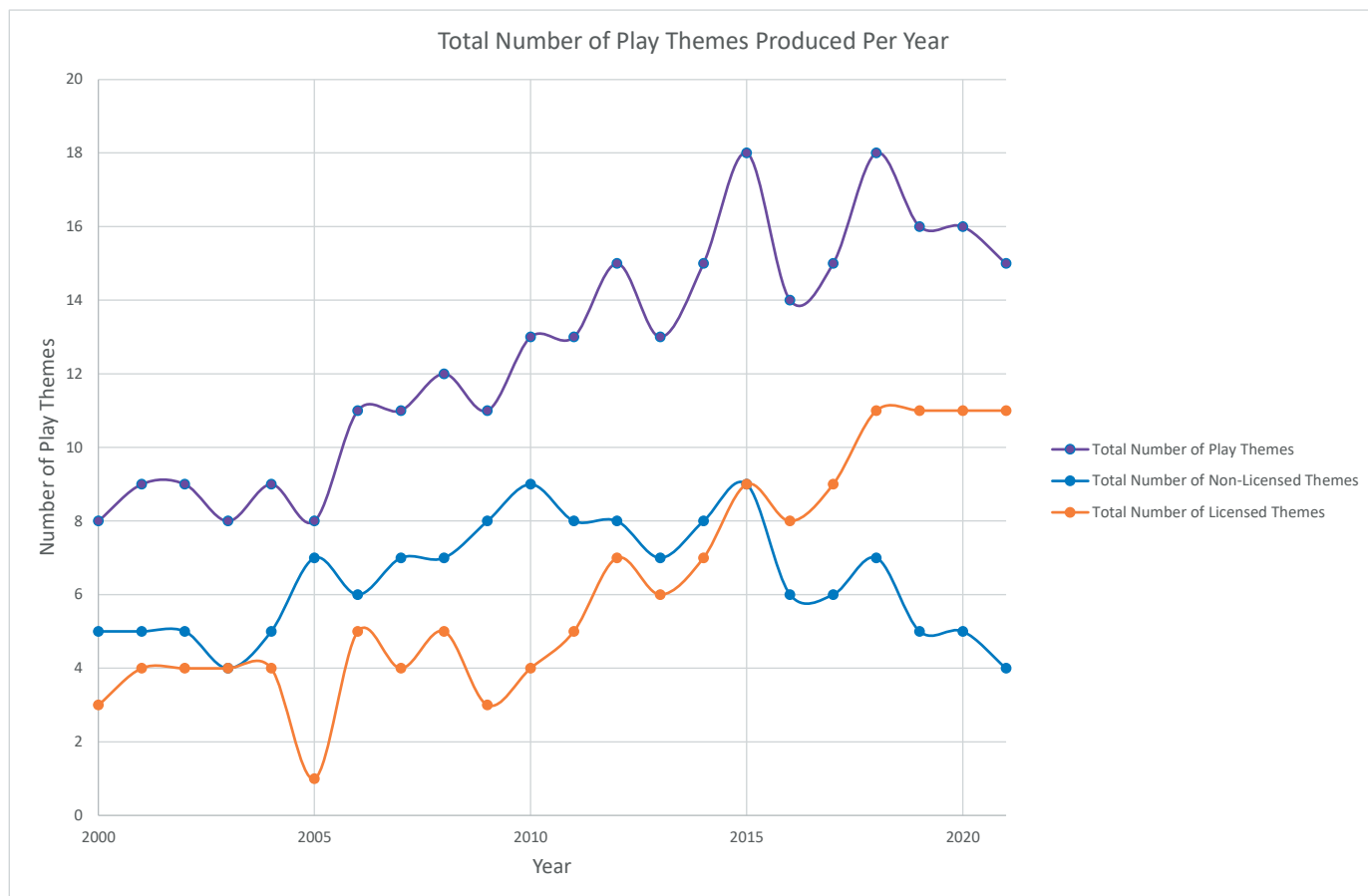
The lack of licensed themes within the LEGO Group's 2009 portfolio counterintuitively heralded the beginning of homegrown themes taking a back seat as the company adopted the toy industry's wider strategy. The split between licensed and non-licensed offerings rapidly narrowed to nearly 50/50 by 2012 and then exactly 50/50 in the milestone year of 2015 before, for the first time, it flipped over to favour licensing in 2016.

During this time several releases occurred that still reverberate through the product line to this day. 2011 saw NINJAGO launch and begin its long-running success story, then 2012 saw the introduction of Friends, Marvel Super Heroes and DC Super Heroes. All of these themes have remained in continual production since their introduction a decade ago. Two years later, Minecraft and Disney were added to this 'evergreen' theme list, then Speed Champions in 2015.

This illustrates another change – the total number of themes produced by the LEGO Group. Back in 2000 it was just eight and basically stayed there, hopping back and forth between eight and nine until 2005. As the company enacted one of the most impressive turnarounds in business history, that number climbed steadily until 2015. Since then it has remained settled around 16.

The release of The LEGO Movie in 2014 presented a challenge in methodology; it seems that Warner Bros. licensed the LEGO Group's IP back to the company for the toys, but given that it was developed as a collaboration between the company and the studio, it is treated here as a non-licensed theme. The LEGO Batman Movie is considered licensed, however, because the central character is from DC Comics.

In 2015 the number of licensed themes and non-licensed themes were



equal at nine apiece. After that, as the total number of themes released each year settled around the new average of 16, the percentage of licensed offerings kept climbing. The licensed side of the product portfolio kept adding evergreen themes, but since Friends and NINJAGO, the LEGO Group has not succeeded in developing any new in-house evergreen themes.

While the picture was varied in the 2000s, the late 2010s seem to show that the market can absorb around 16 LEGO themes and the majority of those need to be licensed, which has led to original product lines being edged out. The situation has almost completely reversed since 2000. Things have shifted from a 63/37 split between non-licensed and licensed in 2000, to 27/73 in 2021.

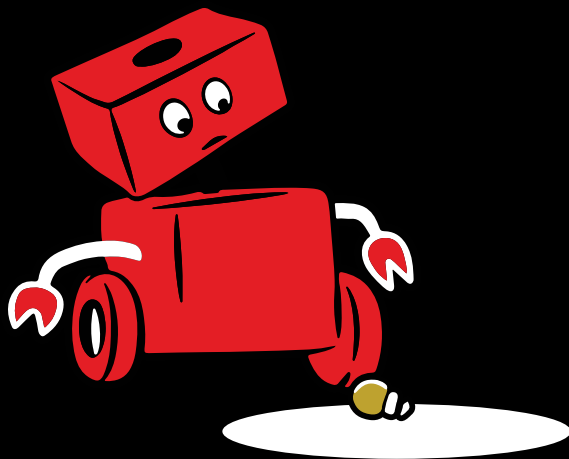
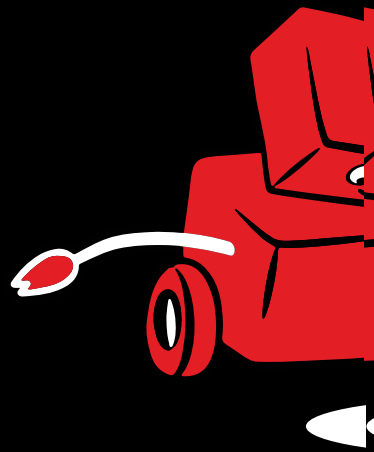
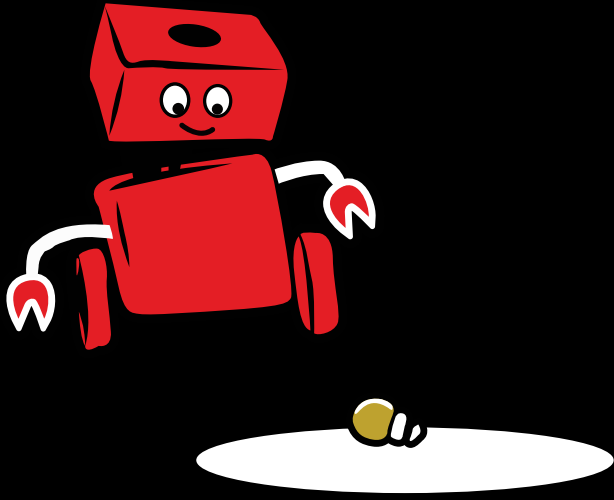
What can be learned from this analysis? This trend is not likely to be reversed. Toy industry experts continue to paint a picture of fragmentation in terms of childrens' attention. Reminding consumers of a company's products will continue to be challenging and will drive companies like the LEGO Group to rely on big entertainment juggernauts that are in the public consciousness. Due to this pinch, room for experimentation is going to be limited. The days of the early 2000s, when there was lots of exploration with one-shot themes, are unlikely to come back anytime soon. ■

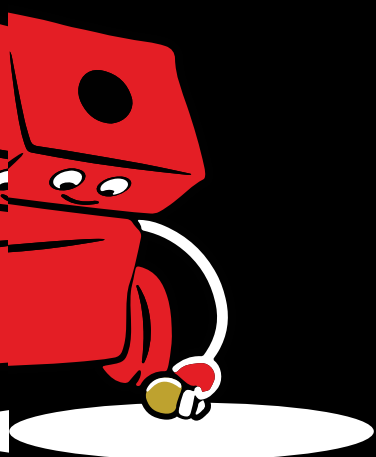
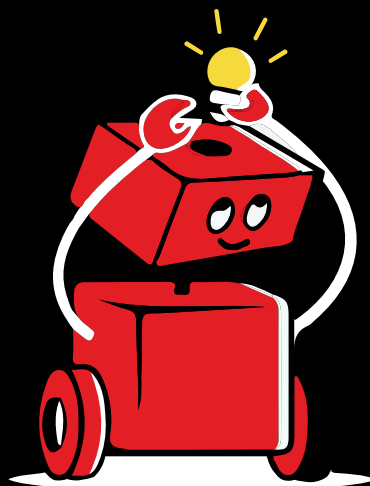
## THE LICENSED SIDE OF THE PRODUCT PORTFOLIO KEPT ADDING EVERGREEN THEMES ■■



**YEAR: 2021**  
**TOTAL PLAY THEMES:**  
**NON-LICENSED = 27%**  
**LICENSED = 73%**







**Imagine a World without light?**  
**Light up your LEGO World today**  
<https://gameofbricks.eu/>





**Price:** £149.99, \$169.99, €169.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 1,022

# 75323 THE JUSTIFIER

Cad Bane flies back into LEGO Star Wars in a massive rendition of his starfighter

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

**THIS 1,022-PIECE SET** presents an interesting conundrum, one that splits LEGO Star Wars collectors. In *Star Wars: The Bad Batch*, Cad Bane's ship appears briefly when the bounty hunter captures Omega, leading to a confrontation with Fennec Shand. While fans of the show are happy to have the opportunity to own a LEGO version of the Justifier, there is a debate as to whether it should be this large – or if a ship with relatively little screen time should be offered at a smaller scale.

When it comes to this review though, the point is to review the set that is released on its merits, not complain that it isn't something different. Given that it's unlikely the Justifier will get another shot at a LEGO set anytime soon, those who are keen on Cad Bane or *The Bad Batch* will want to give this some serious consideration.

The start of the build is noteworthy as there are no Technic elements involved for quite a while. The beginning section builds the cockpit and Omega's cell, then the interior walls around this area. As expected, Technic pieces are then required to make sure that this model will be extremely stable and that its core function will work.

That core function comes straight from the animated series and works masterfully. When in flight mode, the central thruster sits above the rest of the ship – when it's pushed back to move the ship into landing mode, the two landing gears either side of central section lower. It really is an impressively smooth motion.

There's a significant inaccuracy when the ship is in flight mode – there's supposed to be a protrusion sticking out the bottom towards the rear, but on the LEGO model it doesn't come

## VERDICT

The Justifier is enjoyable to build, resulting in a model that is swooshable but not entirely satisfying.

## 65/100



A mini build provides some cargo.



The ship in flight mode.

any lower than the front part. It makes sense that this was omitted from the perspective that the build needs to sit on a shelf or table, but a buildable display stand would have allowed it to be included.

What could be termed the 'sandwich approach' is used for the wings, with plates at the bottom, then bricks building up before another round of plates finishes them off. This allows for the recess around the side, matching the look of the ship's on-screen appearance.

To complete the model, the front section is built and stickered then attached firmly with Mixels joints. The top section at the front sits in place and feels secure, then can be lifted off to access the cockpit and cell.

There's also a bottom interior section, with a ramp opening to reveal it – but it's entirely empty and too long to access. A detachable or hinged

wall here would have been useful, so that this area could actually be playable.

Five characters are included in the set; Hunter and Fennec Shand are the same as previous

## THE CORE FUNCTION COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE ANIMATED SERIES AND WORKS MASTERFULLY

editions – both include hair and helmet pieces, which is very welcome. Omega makes her debut here, perfectly capturing the character's simple attire, including red markings on the arms. An existing hair piece is used in blonde and it is great

for the character.

Cad Bane gets an entirely new look that is spot on for his appearance in *The Bad Batch*. The extra breathing apparatus element is really cool, with the two tubes sitting against his creepy face. Bane's hat is smaller than before, reflecting a shift in the character's design between *The Clone Wars* and *The Bad Batch*. Todo, his droid buddy, is a detailed little piece that accurately captures the design from the animated show.

This is a decent model that for the most part captures the look of the ship from the series. A few compromises have been made and there's only a limited interior considering its size. The mechanism works really well. This is a less essential set than other recent LEGO Star Wars releases, unless of course *The Bad Batch* is your favourite show. ■

The ship in landing mode.

The little droid is excellent.



Cad Bane and Omega are new.



**Price:** £119.99, \$139.99, €139.99 / **Minifigures:** 5 / **Pieces:** 1,082

# 75337 AT-TE WALKER

The AT-TE is back and Cody's bringing the big guns

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

An improvement on a design that was already extremely strong results in a worthy addition to the Republic arsenal.

# 80/100

**STAR WARS: ATTACK** of the Clones is a movie that introduces the audience to an awful lot of incredible designs within a matter of minutes. When Yoda arrives with the Clone Troopers to take on the Separatists on Geonosis, it's a bombardment of Star Wars coolness. One of the fascinating machines introduced in this sequence is the AT-TE, a squat, six-legged walker that couldn't be further removed from the tall and

slender AT-AT.

This latest version of the vehicle is perfect if you're looking for a set that's quick to build yet still results in a large model. Putting together the 1,082 pieces never feels laborious, as what you are doing is constantly shifting. The central core of the set is constructed early on and before you know it you are building the first of the legs.

Not only is the finished model a decent size considering the piece count, it's very accurate to the screen design and is the LEGO Group's best recreation of it yet. It does not offer a completely fresh take on the vehicle, instead building on what has come before – many of the choices are lifted straight from 2016's 75157 Captain Rex's AT-TE,

2013's 75019 AT-TE and even go back as far as 2008's 7675 AT-TE Walker.

That's not necessarily a bad thing though as those were all excellent renditions of this design and it's one that isn't easy to create within the LEGO System. The proportions are accurate, the legs are sturdy and the colour scheme works. Improvements have been made, with the studded feet looking much better than the dishes used in past iterations.

Where there's room for improvement is in the gaps between plates. These line up reasonably well, but recently the LEGO Star Wars design team has been making the sections fit phenomenally well – 75336 Inquisitor Transport



The Spider Droid is in trouble.

The central legs can be posed.



Scythe and 75338 Ambush on Ferrix show just how successfully this can be achieved.

Like 75157, there's quite a good interior to this model. The back opens up well to make a seating and storage area fully accessible, while the cockpit slides out so the driver can be put in place. Behind that there's room for even more troops.

To face off against the walking machine there's a very basic Spider Droid and three Battle Droids. These feel really superfluous, as anyone buying this set for battle purposes will still need a good Separatist model for it to go up against. Instead of these enemies, the set would have been better off including more Clones.

This time around the AT-TE is based on the

Battle of Utapau from *Revenge of the Sith*, so includes Obi-Wan's 212th Clone Troopers. It has taken years to get different Clone Troopers as

## THE PROPORTIONS ARE ACCURATE, THE LEGS ARE STURDY AND THE COLOUR SCHEME WORKS

minifigures in movie accurate armour, because the original 2005 minifigures were based on concept art and the Clone's armour markings

changed significantly by the time the movie was released.

Three of the minifigures are regular Clone Troopers, one is a Gunner and the other is Commander Cody. Every one of them features all of the detailed torso and leg printing you expect as well as really nicely decorated helmets.

If you have the 2013 version of the AT-TE you can justify skipping this one and hope for an Ultimate Collector Series release down the line, as to go much further than the designers have already will probably require a big shift in scale. For those who don't have this beast of a Republic walker already though, this is the best version yet – it has incrementally improved on excellent designs. ■

Commander Cody and his troops.



Three classic Battle Droids are included.



**Price:** £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 510

# 76398 HOGWARTS HOSPITAL WING

When your Harry Potter minifigures get injured running from evil wizards, send them to the hospital

**Words & Pics:** Daniel Konstanski

This set continues the modular design.



## VERDICT

Another great addition to the modular Hogwarts collection is hampered by a couple of unfortunate aesthetic choices.

**72/100**

**WAY BACK IN** the early 2000s, when LEGO Harry Potter first hit shelves, designers did their best to make it so the various sets based on Hogwarts Castle could join together. It wasn't a major selling point and worked only moderately well when attempted – but it was a very cool concept.

For the 2021 anniversary products, the LEGO Group took a page from LEGO Friends and brought that original dream to glorious fruition. In that series, and all subsequent waves since, a modular design system has been used with the same rules for sizing and placement of pins. Thanks to this, each and every set depicting a part of the castle can be mixed and matched to combine with any other. 76398 Hogwarts Hospital Wing continues that fantastic tradition, but with a couple of missteps.

Given all of the child endangerment that occurs at Hogwarts, the Hospital Wing's infirmary features multiple times in both the books and films. Many of the details mentioned or depicted in those media are faithfully recreated here, from beds lined up for petrified children to be laid in side by side, to skele-gro for regrowing Harry's missing bones. Madam Pomfrey also makes her minifigure debut.

Sitting atop the hospital corridors is a clock tower that utilises the same design and printing as 75948 Hogwarts Clock Tower from 2019. Considering that older set is getting ready to retire, providing another source of the iconic clockface makes sense. Like its processor, the hands on the clock can be spun with a set of gears hidden in the roof that are activated by

## **HINGES HAVE BEEN INCLUDED SO THAT THE MODEL CAN OPEN INTO A FAN SHAPE**

rotating one of the towers.

Faithful to the modular design approach, this whole wing can be joined or stacked amongst other Hogwarts sets. However, it also makes a few unfortunate choices that stymie the effectiveness of this. Most glaring amongst these is the choice to include white lattice in the windows. Previous sets have all used black, so these are going to stand out like a sore thumb in among other sets. While children likely won't

mind, it will bother adults. Including parts in different colours keeps the novelty factor up, but consistency in things such as windows feels like it should trump the need for something new, especially since everything is designed to be joined together. Additionally, the fact that it can open leads to a few challenges.

In an effort to make this set a little more interesting, hinges have been included so that the model can open into a fan shape, with each of the three beds having its own little section. This is a great little addition for when the Hospital Wing is all on its own, but the strength of the set is slightly compromised because the clock tower section doesn't have the support it typically would.

The set is rounded out with an excellent collection of minifigures, including Madam Pomfrey and an injured Ron. The white leg as a cast is fantastic, as is his tattered outfit.

76398 Hogwarts Hospital Wing will be a welcome addition for those who have been building up their giant Hogwarts Castle one modular section at a time over the last year, albeit with perhaps the need to swap out some window colours. For the price it's also a great stand alone model. ■



**Madam Pomfrey makes her debut.**

**The clockface can rotate with the turn of a tower.**



**Three hospital beds can be fanned out.**





**Price:** £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 671

# 76406 HUNGARIAN HORNTAIL DRAGON

The LEGO Group's third Hungarian Horntail is the most accurate ever, but it can't fly free

**Words & Pics:** Daniel Konstanski

## VERDICT

The most movie accurate LEGO Hungarian Horntail yet would be even better if it detached from the base.

**77/100**

The mighty dragon is terrifying.

**NINJAGO HAS BEEN** a fantastic incubator for LEGO dragons. Years of brick-built beasts, going all the way back to the theme's first wave, have made designers masters of capturing these ferocious creatures in brick form. All of those lessons have been combined with the mechanics perfected in 76394 Fawkes, Dumbledore's Phoenix and 75979 Hedwig to create something magnificent.

The LEGO Group has produced three versions of Harry Potter's titular dragon and the two earlier releases were moulded, limiting their articulation and size. With a mid-level price slot allocated to it and over 600 bricks just for the dragon, 76406 is finally able to realise a minifigure scale, movie accurate Hungarian Horntail.

Every detail of its on-screen counterpart is accounted for, from its colouring to the ferocious claws, sharp spines down the back, flaring spikes all around the head, club tail and overall ferocious look. It's a terrifying looking beast – just as it should be – and the Harry minifigure included doesn't look nearly scared enough.





The wings flap when the crank is turned.



Harry and his Nimbus broom are included.

## IT'S A TERRIFYING LOOKING BEAST – JUST AS IT SHOULD BE

Fans of the movie will be delighted with this model that, in keeping with its predecessors, has an articulated flapping mechanic propelled by rotating a crank at its base. It's a beautiful, multifaceted motion that looks exactly like flapping wings in the real world. Both its accuracy and how thoroughly the gears and drives are hidden demonstrate the excellence of 76406's design. Mounted on its base this is a fine display piece for the corner of any Potterhead's desk or bookshelf.

However, that base leads to the maddening frustration of 76406 Hungarian Horntail. In the case of both Fawkes and Hedwig, affixing them permanently to their stands made perfect sense. Their scale was completely disproportionate to minifigures, and they were clearly not meant to be anything more than (fabulous) display pieces. Ostensibly, Hungarian Horntail is the third of that series, but because it is perfectly to scale with the Harry minifigure, the desire to detach this dragon from its base is almost overpowering.

Such separation is fairly easy to accomplish

by popping off just a couple of bricks, but the creature was not designed for play. Without the full mechanism its wings sag, the legs are too thin and static for posing, while the end of the tail falls off quickly. It's clear that this is not what the set was designed to do, instead simply continuing the formula established before, but an exception or evolution should have been made in this case. Children, and probably many adults, would love to include this magnificent dragon in a story for play or display, and it just isn't possible. This feels like a missed opportunity.

As a display piece, 76406 Hungarian is magnificent, effortlessly taking its place as the best of what is emerging as a subtheme of Harry Potter that mounts magical creatures on display stands. However, its scaling and detail will have fans itching to detach it from that base and when they do it will lead to disappointment. Make sure you understand those limitations before purchasing and you'll be happy with this beautiful build. ■



**Price:** £24.99, \$29.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 297

# 76396 HOGWARTS MOMENT: DIVINATION CLASS

Is this a set that you will see yourself building in the future?

**Words & Pics:** Anthony Walker-Cook

## VERDICT

Professor Trelawney and Parvati Patil appeal in this niche Hogwarts Moments set.

**60/100**

**DIVINATION IS A** questionable academic pursuit in the Wizarding World, and at Hogwarts the subject's classroom is described as a cross between an attic and a tea shop. Continuing the series of Hogwarts Moment sets, 76396 Hogwarts Moment: Divination Class manages to achieve a passing grade.

The Divination classroom room is described as being draped in red curtains, which is simply but neatly captured in this set through several dark red pieces. This set is heavily reliant on large stickers, which is understandable given both the £24.99 price and the limited size.

There are numerous references to the various aspects of the study of divination within the set. Teapots and teacups are ready for Tasseography, there is a crystal ball for scrying and in the

middle of the build a diamond (which has throughout history been used as a way of warding off evil spirits) is on display.

As in the other Moments sets, there's also a (unexpectedly bright yellowish green coloured)

**THE SET FOLDS UP COMPACTLY SO THAT IT CAN BE DISPLAYED AS A CLOSED BOOK**

book, presumably Unfogging the Future, the subject's core text, with a printed tile inside that depicts the Grim, a figure thought to foreshadow death.

The Professor Trelawney minifigure, dressed in a brown cardigan with golden accents, is gloriously detailed. There's the cursory Harry Potter minifigure but receiving Parvati Patil in Gryffindor robes is welcome.

As has become the style of the Hogwarts Moment sets, the set folds up compactly so that it can be displayed as a closed book. The dark purple book cover, whilst befitting of the mysterious subject, doesn't quite fit with the older Hogwarts Moment sets, which all used lighter tones.

Divination is an optional subject at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and similarly only those most dedicated to the Harry Potter theme can probably foresee themselves buying this set. ■



Stickers complement bricks in this small set.

**Price:** £17.99, \$19.99, €19.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 121

# 76400 HOGWARTS CARRIAGE AND THESTRALS

Is a baby Thestral all that will tempt Potterheads towards this small set?

**Words & Pics:** Anthony Walker-Cook

**THE CHEAPEST SET** in a wave can be a challenge – get it right, and the set offers brilliant value for money. Get it wrong, and the set becomes a bizarre irrelevancy that's easily ignored for the bigger (and better) sets in the wave. Unfortunately, 76400 Hogwarts Carriage and Thestrals falls into the latter category.

Throughout Harry Potter's early years at Hogwarts, he's surprised by the seemingly horseless carriages that take students from Hogsmeade station to Hogwarts for the new academic year. This all changes however once Harry watches the murder of Cedric Diggory; at the beginning of Harry's fifth year, he sees skeletal horse-like animals pulling the carriages.

The newer Thestral piece has been seen before in 75951 Grindelwald's Escape, but it's hard not to still be taken by the ghostly elegance of this animal, especially given its black and grey wings and striking white eyes. Alongside the adult Thestral is a baby Thestral piece that is new to this set; even though it is adorable, it is without any articulation. It's cute, but there's not much more to it than that.

The carriage itself is sturdy and compact. It's relatively basic, but a couple of silver metallic studs add some nice embellishment. There's

also the cursory tree that forms a part of the Forbidden Forest, the Harry Potter locale that designers so willingly foist upon any build that it might be relevant to.

And who might be travelling in this carriage?

**IT'S HARD NOT TO BE TAKEN BY THE GHOSTLY ELEGANCE OF THIS ANIMAL**

The set comes with two minifigures – a very cute Luna Lovegood wearing a so-far exclusive tan dress and holding a block of meat to feed the Thestrals, and Harry Potter himself, who is

sporting an open hoodie over his uniform. The clothing variety is certainly welcome and both characters make perfect sense in the context of the scene depicted. But why, then, does this set feel a bit like a damp squib?

The previous two sets at this inexpensive price point – 75966 Hogwarts Room of Requirement and 76386 Hogwarts Polyjuice Potion Mistake – impressively capture iconic scenes (with brilliant minifigures) despite their diminutive size. From the beginning, then, 76400 Hogwarts Carriage and Thestrals faces a challenge, for the scene it captures is neither memorable nor exciting. The builds would work a lot better as part of a larger set – perhaps the Hogwarts gates or the Hogsmeade train station – but by itself it doesn't have quite enough substance. ■

## VERDICT

The bar has been set high for these small sets and even a flying horse can't reach it.

**52/100**

The young Thestral piece is new.



Harry and Luna feed the Thestrals.



**Price:** £19.99, \$19.99, €24.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 298

# 76911 007 ASTON MARTIN DB5

Now pay attention Blocks reader, this vehicle has some special modifications

**Words:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Phil Wrighton, Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

The Speed Champions attention to detail is expertly applied to cinema's most recognisable ride.

# 83/100

**SPEED CHAMPIONS IS** going beyond motorsports in two new sets, one of which also provides cinema's longest-running action hero as a minifigure for the first time. 76911 007 Aston Martin DB5 builds the iconic grand tourer and given its association with James Bond, includes a minifigure of the professional spy and assassin.

It is entirely understandable if long-standing Speed Champions enthusiasts are disappointed to see the move in this direction, as it can be very frustrating when something with such a clear identity shifts gears. Hopefully these vehicles best known from the silver screen will be occasional detours between the typical race car builds.

The positive case for bringing fiction into Speed Champions is that this will give the uninitiated a chance to experience what this absolutely phenomenal theme has to offer. While many LEGO themes provide intricate, detailed builds, very few manage to deliver them at the price point that Speed Champions does, with such pleasingly consistent results.

As ever, the building begins with the bespoke base, which is layered with tiles and plates that will ensure everything lines up correctly later. The back of the car is built up and finished with plates so that everything has a smooth, studless finish. Curved bricks run alongside the edges to convey

the rounded shape of the DB5.

The cleverest piece of engineering in this model is the use of the bar system to attach the lower front section with the licence plate, as it slots into place to give just the right length that can't be delivered the traditional way. Not long later, the use of a wall double corner piece feels like something so ingenious it must have come out of Q Branch. New parts are included to add to the authenticity, including the wheel caps and rear windscreen.

When it comes to Speed Champions, the stickers are forgivable because the build process is so carefully thought out and intricate. If a model is really going all-out when it comes to building techniques, it's almost earning the right to include a few stickers to get the very fine detail that only graphics can deliver. Fortunately the theme now includes more printed parts, so the labels are not as excessive as they once were.

At this scale the gadgets are out of the question – there were limits to how many of them could be fitted into 2018's much larger 10262 James Bond Aston Martin DB5 – so this is a faithful 'real life' version of the car. There is a nod to is the rotating licence plate from the film, with multiple spare plates and stickers included so you can switch it out to represent the car from different scenes and films. A sticker also represents the tracking system next to the steering wheel.

007 himself is based on the Daniel Craig portrayal of the character; entirely understandable given he is who current

audiences are familiar with, and he did drive the DB5 extensively during his tenure. Knowing that the actor is exiting the series and fairly soon a new Bond will be announced, the timing could have been better though. There's also a strong case that Sean Connery should have been the included Bond, as it was he who first drove the car in 1964's Goldfinger.

The minifigure is excellent, with just the right number of lines to convey Daniel Craig's craggy face and a slightly unhappy expression well suited to the character, given what he went through during the five movies. Hair colour is spot on, capturing the actor's dirty blonde well. A lovely tuxedo print runs down from the torso onto the legs, with the perfect amount of detail and some lovely off-white colour.

Given how desirable this character will be for some, it's amazing that the LEGO Group has delivered him in such an affordable box. While it's surprising that the company has gone there and provided a James Bond minifigure, fans of the iconic character can now start debating which of the other actors they want in the brick next.

At this scale, it's absolutely amazing that the design team has delivered such an accurate DB5. It's great that this move into movie cars has occurred at this point in the life of Speed Champions, as the creatives are at the top of their game, using techniques to deliver fine detail in a way that few other 8+ sets do. The shaping of the iconic vehicle has been captured, with the minor comprises all acceptable at this size. ■



Multiple licence plates are included.



Please bring it back in 298 assembled pieces.

'The name's  
Bond, James  
Bond.'

■ ■ THIS WILL GIVE THE  
UNINITIATED A CHANCE  
TO EXPERIENCE WHAT  
THIS ABSOLUTELY  
PHENOMENAL THEME  
HAS TO OFFER ■ ■





**Price:** £4.99, \$5.99, €5.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** Varies

# 71410 CHARACTER PACKS SERIES 5

It's time for another eight characters to expand the LEGO Super Mario world

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

The price increase isn't justified by the very slightly increased piece count – the characters are still great though.

**65/100**

### RED YOSHI

Literally colour swapping Yellow Yoshi, this red version of the character contrasts nicely with the yellow base. The base is larger than previous series, presumably to make the higher price feel fair. Within the gameplay, Red Yoshi behaves the same as Yellow Yoshi.



### NABBIT

One of the best designs in Super Mario is that of Nabbit and it translates really well here. The childlike drawing of a mouth makes for a great printed part and the square sack is where Mario will have to jump to defeat him and gain Star Power.



### HAMMER BRO

This is such a fun variation on the Koopa and it's great to see it make a LEGO appearance. The helmet is wonderfully represented and the printed brick completes it nicely. The flame littered environment is a nice bonus. To defeat this enemy, Mario will need to hit them four times.



**WADDLEWING**

The fantastically named Waddlewing is expertly delivered as a LEGO model here. No matter how frustrating they are, they have a cute design that translates really well. Clear pieces give the illusion of it gliding. To defeat Waddlewing, Mario only needs to hit it once.

**TOADY**

The design of Toady, with that blank expression, is great fun and makes the character a joy to build and then see sitting on a cloud, staring ahead. The brown shoes are not necessarily the best choice for the feet here. This is another one-hit enemy for Mario.

**BLUE SHY GUY**

It could be argued that recoloured characters are lazy, but when the original character design is so strong it's entirely forgivable. Like Red Yoshi, Blue Shy Guy looks excellent and stands in a swampy environment. Mario needs to hit the character once to defeat them.

**BABY YOSHI**

The squat proportions of a newborn Yoshi are captured well in this little model. A printed 2x2 lilypad is included as part of the water environment. When Mario greets Baby Yoshi, the character pops up on his chest and makes an adorable little sound.

**PURPLE TOAD**

It's hard to imagine a Super Mario layout with too many Toads. This one matches those that have come before, but with a purple jacket and purple dots on the mushroom head element. Mario will earn some coins when he greets them. ■



**Price:** £114.99, \$129.99, €129.99 / **Characters:** 5 / **Pieces:** 1,216

# 71408 PRINCESS PEACH'S CASTLE

Knock Bowser off the throne and help Peach get back where she belongs

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

This model looks fantastic on display and makes for a cohesive level to play through too.

# 79/100

**WHEN IT COMES** to the Super Mario theme, the boss sets have so far been the best by far. 71369 Bowser's Castle Boss Battle and 71391 Bowser's Airship both actually involve some decent building and result in models that really look the part as well as being playable, whereas the smaller expansions often offer more rudimentary building and less attractive models.

71408 Princess Peach's Castle continues that tradition. At first glance, seeing the red moulded pieces used for the tower tops, it might seem like this will be a set made up of huge elements; these are the exception not the rule though and it is a really enjoyable model to put together. The entrance uses SNOT technique to give it the cartoonish finish that suits Super Mario, while the side sections include details on the interior.

The most intricate part of the build process is

the throne room, which begins by constructing the mechanism that sits beneath the throne and causes it to spin around. There are then two sides of it to construct; one that is Peach's idyllic royal seat and one that is Bowser's domain of villainy.

## THE MOST INTRICATE PART OF THE BUILD PROCESS IS THE THRONE ROOM

A lovely printed stained glass window element is placed above it, just as it appears in the games.

One commonality in this theme that must be reiterated yet again is how flimsy the set is. Why is this the only theme that has decided stability

is completely unnecessary? Children need to be able to reconfigure their layouts, but they also need them to stay together as they bounce Peach around them. It's still really frustrating that the design team won't add more plates to reinforce the tracks.

As for the gameplay, it works really well. Of course it's best played with Peach herself, now available in 71403 Adventures with Peach. Placing her in the set's start pipe will give her 80 seconds to complete it, so the extra 30 seconds provided by the time block are very useful. Unique music plays as she goes about the castle on her way to defeating Bowser.

There are some fun ways to play inside the castle, including a power up hidden by a picture of a Bob-omb, which then allows Peach to defeat the exploding enemy. A Goomba hiding inside a

Peach's Castle makes for an impressive layout.



cake is really fun too.

It feels like a really logical progression through the castle to the point of confronting Bowser, where you can press levers either side of the buildable bad guy to knock him off his spot, then defeat him in the unusual way. Pulling Peach back on the platform spins the throne around to reveal her rightful place, where you can seat the Princess. It's a bit strange that doing so doesn't end the level, so you'll need to add a finish spot

from a starter set to the course.

While Bowser has been included in previous sets, it's important to keep the main villain of the franchise in circulation, so it's no disappointment to get him here. Ludwig is entirely new to the theme and the designers have done a great job of capturing his blue hair.

While 71407 Cat Peach Suit and Frozen Tower fits well within the same world as this model, the different aesthetic for the tower means it doesn't

add to the castle as well as you might think.

This is a really satisfying set, offering decent gameplay and an attractive, cartoonish build. The problem with this theme though is that to get a fully satisfying level in a box you are having to spend £114.99/\$129.99 – the gameplay still isn't enough to justify the price. If you can get this model at a decent discount, it's worth adding to your collection alongside the new Peach starter set. ■

There's fruit  
and a cake  
to eat.



You'll have  
to deal with  
Bowser...



...before you  
can return  
to the throne.



**Price:** £129.99, \$149.99, €149.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 1,998

# 31206 THE ROLLING STONES

Can you get no satisfaction from a LEGO Art set that breaks the mould?

**Words:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** The LEGO Group

## VERDICT

LEGO Art moves a fraction closer to 'proper' LEGO building by layering tiles and shaping the frame.

**66/100**

**IT'S APPROPRIATE THAT** it's a set inspired by the Rolling Stones that breaks out of LEGO Art's square frames. The British rock band were not content with simply channelling their energy through their music and instead lived – and in many ways created – the mythical rock n' roll lifestyle. The Stones have been performing forever (well, since 1962) and continue to tour, no matter how old Mick Jagger and Keith Richards get.

The iconic tongue and lips logo has been with the band since 1971. It was designed by John Pasche with influence from the Hindu goddess Kali and the goal of conveying the band's anti-authoritarian vibe. It has been adapted as a brick model as the LEGO Group seeks to reach music fans with appealing products.

Blocks magazine's biggest complaint about LEGO Art as a theme is that it doesn't use the full potential of the LEGO System, the beauty of which is that it can produce three dimensional models without the use of special tools or knowledge. 31206 The Rolling Stones pushes things a little further than the theme's other sets, as instead of just using the bespoke 16x16 squares, you are required to build a massive, shaped Technic frame in sections.

When a section of frame is built, it's time to add plates and tiles; unlike other Art sets though, which use only 1x1 pieces, elements of all shapes and sizes capture the outline of the logo. This makes the build much more interesting. While the rhythm of mosaicking is enjoyable, seeing the way that different shaped parts convey shape and texture is getting closer to the heart of what the LEGO System is all about.

Those who do love this theme for its 1x1

## ELEMENTS OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES CAPTURE THE OUTLINE OF THE LOGO

rounds won't be completely disappointed though; once the outline of the mouth has been achieved, it's then time to take single studs and apply them to the blank space that's left. The studs are arranged in a '60', acknowledging the milestone year that the Stones have reached in 2022. At this point you can stop building and enjoy the model as it is, or keep going for the familiar look.

If you keep building, the 60 is then covered by red plates, with more plates and tiles then layered on top; the design on other Art sets are just one plate thick, yet this one builds further out from the canvas than that. It suits the subject matter perfectly, really adding to the effect of the tongue sticking out. When you have completed the build and step back from it, the tongue looks like it is more than just a brick high. The illusion is fantastic.

Lingering doubts about how much of a LEGO build this is remain; you wind up with something to hang on a wall and view from one angle, rather than a tactile model that you can enjoy from all angles. That said, it pushes the format in a more interesting way than any other set in the theme has yet.

It's hard to see the Rolling Stones as the anti-establishment band they presented as in the early years when they go on expensive arena tours and allow the logo to be applied to fridge magnets, prints and LEGO sets – but their impact on music and culture at large is enormous. If you're a fan of the band then this familiar icon of British culture is more fun to build than other Art sets and will really add some colour to your wall. ■







**Price:** £54.99, \$59.99, €59.99 / **Mini-dolls:** 3 / **Pieces:** 642

# 41708 ROLLER DISCO ARCADE

Time to put on your roller boots and plastic shades – the LEGO Friends are going full neon

**Words:** David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

**FOR ANYONE WHO** lived through the 1980s it often seems that in popular culture there is a rose-tinted lens through which others view it. That means it's no surprise that this 1980s-inspired LEGO Friends Roller Disco Arcade has sensibly chosen to embrace the garish neon colours of the period and not themed it around the Olympic Games boycott or the miners' strike.

What this model offers instead of a depressing history lecture is a glorious retro celebration of the era, filled with cute nostalgic moments and some wonderful play features. The five bags are sequenced in the familiar modular approach that

Friends likes to employ. The first re-introduces you to Jackson, wearing the same outfit as in

## THIS MODEL OFFERS A GLORIOUS RETRO CELEBRATION OF THE ERA

41703 Friendship Tree House, but with a more brightly coloured wheelchair.

The bowling alley and its six pins

(unfortunately it's six-pin bowling and not ten for some reason) come together quickly with some nice details around the ball return and scoring screen. The stickered graphic above the lane and area to store the pins when they're not in use are great touches. The bowling is playable too, to an extent. Don't expect to be racking up too many strikes, but the concept works well enough.

The arcade portion of the building is next, along with an updated Evelyn mini-doll that features a cool lightning bolt glitter tattoo on one eye. The building itself is bright and colourful, with transparent multi coloured bricks alongside trans

## VERDICT

A fun packed build leads to a fun packed and colourful building.

# 82/100



Play some 1980s hits while building.

neon green windows and curved panels. The dark purple brickwork and archways that surround them look a little drab at first but complement the vibrant colours well once complete. Inside there is a two-player dance arcade machine, a driving game and an air hockey table. These are adorable mini builds in their own right, with clever use of parts and stud reversal techniques achieving the desired look using only a few bricks each.

Roller disco queen Andrea, with a new hairstyle, begins bag three in style. An oval section of flooring, ringed with neon yellow tiles and transparent plates brings a distinct disco vibe to the proceedings. Three large gear plates are hidden beneath the floor, two of which are topped with circular plates for the Friends to stand on, providing the ability to rotate them together. It's a simple mechanism, and certainly a well-used Friends play feature, but the decorative elements

like the large speaker system and details such as the boot lockers and karaoke area bring considerable charm. The same bright walls and panels line the arena and when both sides of the building are connected to the bowling alley using hinge bricks, the overall theme of the building and the way it opens out starts to make more sense.

Unlike other doll house style builds, where the reverse of the building is open to allow access, the roller disco arena opens and closes rather neatly. This creates easier access to the central bowling lane, roller disco and arcade sections on either side of it. The footprint of the building changes drastically of course, so anyone wanting to incorporate this into an existing Heartlake City display might want to consider that.

With the major elements completed, the final decorations can be added – the brick-built signage above the main entrance is a particular highlight here, with a bowling pin (cleverly

topped with an egg element), roller boot and gaming controller. Topping the exterior roof line are a series of pink curves that work well in the already bright theme and the interesting use of yellow flexible hoses creates an even more neon/futuristic look to the curved purple archways and brickwork.

The arena looks terrific when closed and when opened allows easy access to the play features as well as providing space to hold a smartphone. It's not immediately clear what this adds to a 1980s themed LEGO set, or indeed, how it's supposed to be used. This oddity aside, the great selection of coloured parts and clever build techniques combine well and the selection of mini-dolls and playable aspects are all well balanced. It might not be the 1980s that you lived through, but it's still a great set packed with fun features. ■



Andrea doesn't care who is listening.





**Price:** £89.99, \$99.99, €99.99 / **Mini-dolls:** 4 / **Pieces:** 1,154

# 41714 ANDREA'S THEATRE SCHOOL

The LEGO Friends tread the boards, but is this production going to be a sell-out?

**Words:** David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

**THE ACTOR SIMON** Callow once described theatre as a 'magical space' and 'the sacred arena of the imagination.' If there's one LEGO theme that tries to embody that spirit more than any other then it's LEGO Friends – 41714 Andrea's Theatre School attempts to distil that essence of imagination and wonder with only 1,154 pieces and does a remarkable job of it.

If for some reason you doubted that this is a Friends set, such thoughts are immediately quashed through the application of stickers and building a toilet. It might not sound like the most auspicious of starts but this initial ground floor level of this three-storey structure is vitally important. A toilet, storage room, pipe organ and various props are crammed into a very small area beneath the main stage. A Technic beam structure with a single axle acts as a simple

mechanism to hold in place a trap door in the centre of the stage.

Above the stage, the wings have multiple props and costume changes, ready for the performers. There's a mix of physical props and stickers here,

## THE FINISHED BUILDING HAS A CLEAR AND COHERENT STYLE

with stands for various wigs and helmets and a trunk full of accessories. The floor above has more props, a makeup area and also houses the lighting gantry. This is a neat side-built section that slots into place above the main stage so it

can be easily removed. Lights and props (a cloud is provided) hang down from the gantry, creating a realistic behind-the-scenes theatre experience. In front of the gantry and above the main stage, hidden by some ornate gold detailing, is a simple Technic gearing system that moves two arms laterally. Large red fabric pieces are connected to these arms creating a simple, but effective, opening curtain that covers the stage. It's a little disappointing that the curtains don't open in unison, and they don't open fully enough to reveal the entire stage (a stud either side is lost), but the dramatic effect is still impressive.

Behind the stage a clever interchangeable backdrop system has been created. The backdrops themselves are 16x16 plates, with simple scenes laid onto them – a forest castle and night-time cityscape are included – that

## VERDICT

Packed full of charm and imagination-grabbing play features, this is a great choice for budding performers.

**89/100**

Rehearsals are in progress.



could easily be adapted or entirely replaced. The two backdrop plates are stored back-to-back in a specially created recess behind the stage, held loosely in place by two arms. It's another simple mechanism that creates endless opportunities for expansion and works very well.

The interior of the theatre is a lavish affair, filled with more gold detailing across the walls and the box seats at either side of the main area. These seats are neat mini builds, featuring curves and arches in different orientations to create a convincing VIP area. A row of 'cheap seats' completes the interior, with space for five mini-dolls to watch the production. The lettering on the stickered 'Assembly Theatre' sign above the stage echoes the art deco feel of the design and the finished building has a clear and coherent style that feels both appropriate and evocative.

Outside the theatre the theme continues, with white pillars, arches and more ornate detailing. The wings of the theatre close and lock pleasingly into place to create the exterior view. The upper windows display billboards for other performances – including what appears to be an *Elves* musical – and below them the main

entrance and ticket office window are topped with a curved banner displaying the current showtimes.

The street scene created in such a small space is delightful – a traditional lamp post and British post box are featured, a nod to the inspiration provided by London's West End, and stickered road names such as 'Brickadilly Circus' add to this feeling. The use of teal ingots along each edge of the exterior and white heart tiles across the roofline are nice touches too. The front of the theatre is certainly impressive, although the illusion is somewhat broken by the messier sides and exposed roof area.

A theatre is nothing without performers, of course, and the diverse collection of mini-dolls is a real treat. Andrea is the eponymous star of the set, with her new hairstyle and bright coral dress. Professor Adrian wears a denim jacket and red trainers as he shouts direction through his megaphone and face-painted Freya, with her walkie talkie and casual outfit, appears to be running things backstage. Ollie completes the cast and is Andrea's co-star, with his fancy gold inlaid shirt and script accessory.

There's a huge amount of character in this set, from the sumptuous theme to the sheer volume of accessories and props, those clever backdrops and the great selection of mini-dolls. It's a very playable and fun model that strikes the perfect balance between functional and fun. Truly a magical space. ■



Assembly Theatre's exterior.

Backstage is where all the action happens.





**Price:** £24.99, \$44.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 310

# 60345 FARMERS MARKET VAN

LEGO City leaves the streets and heads for the countryside

**Words:** David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

**LEGO CITY IS** getting out of the metropolis with a range of farming-related sets, and 60345 Farmers Market Van bridges the gap between farm and table.

A generous three minifigures are included, all exclusive to this set. Horace the farmer, with his lime dungarees and grey sideburns is the only named character, also appearing in the LEGO City animated series. Assisting him in selling his produce is an unnamed character with striking

blue hair and an orange padded jacket elements that haven't been featured before. A customer in a red jacket completes the line-up and the brightly coloured nature of the minifigures continues to the van itself.

The orange and green colour scheme is bright and bold, working well on a van of this scale. It's a similar size and style to other LEGO City vans, but the white rear doors make good use of the relatively new 6x6 double door frame. The layout

is pretty smart with space in the rear to store a crate or two of fresh produce with room for a forklift to extract them.

One side of the van is hinged to allow access to the interior – it's a simple and well-used mechanism that fulfils the brief. The interior is more sparse, with space for the unnamed server to stand and a small area for a till. The opposite side of the van features a sliding serving hatch for minifigures to use, although the height of the hatch would make this a challenge in real life.

The van looks great and the design could easily be translated into other functions. Most of the smaller details are accomplished via stickers, which is understandable but the large brick-built carrot adorning the roof is quite a departure. It's a cute addition that adds character to the van at the expense of aerodynamics.

Accompanying the van is the produce itself. A cute little crop field with a groundwater pump and 'pop-up' carrot play feature is joined together with Technic pins, for easy expansion. The crops themselves are worthy of note too, using a new modified candlestick and pipe element – this features a curved arm and stud attached to the main body and is cleverly used in both directions to represent grapes and peppers hanging down as well as the new sweetcorn element growing upwards.

Although the low stakes means that this feels like a set that parents hope their children would want to play with, it has some genuine charm and interesting new elements. A decent addition for any collector, although the eye-watering US price might mean this fresh new produce offers the best value for European fans. ■

## VERDICT

A change of pace from city life with some great new elements.

**60/100**

## THE LARGE BRICK-BUILT CARROT ADORNING THE ROOF IS QUITE A DEPARTURE

The carrot topped van is anything but subtle.



**Price:** £44.99, \$69.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 230

# 60346 BARN & FARM ANIMALS

Is it worth picking up this 4+ set just for the farmyard animals?

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

The builds are what you'll expect from a 4+ set; this one's all about the animals.

**55/100**

**IT'S AMAZING HOW** City has opened the floodgates when it comes to animals. For years, fans had to wait for new creatures to trickle out, then with the safari subtheme came multiple animal moulds all at once. Now, the single 60346 Barn & Farm Animals set is doing the same for farmyard animals.

The new cow and lamb were introduced in this set but have since appeared in 10305 Lion Knights' Castle. Of the two options, this is by far the cheapest way to get them. The cow is back after a significant hiatus so is really welcome, especially in this colour. The lamb is beautiful little part, incredibly detailed at this tiny scale.

As for the calf and piglets, these remain exclusive to this particular box. They are perfect, taking design cues from the fully grown animals

so that they look as if they belong in the same world.

The squirrel and sheep have appeared in other sets, but there's an absolutely brilliant new

## THERE'S A BIG WOOLLY COAT THAT YOU CAN PLACE ON THE SHEEP

element; a big woolly coat that you can place on the sheep and then remove as if it has been sheared. This is using the LEGO System in a really intelligent, intuitive way.

There are also some bricks in the box of

course. This isn't as basic as some 4+ sets, occasionally using techniques that will teach younger children how to use certain aspects of the LEGO System. Huge wall pieces still deliver most of the building's height though and specialised bases mean the tractor is built in just a few minutes.

What is impressive is that several aspects of an idealised farm life have been captured in the model; the tractor, the barnyard, the greenhouse and the animal cleaning station. This means that children can understand caring for livestock (and perhaps considering its ultimate fate) as well as growing and harvesting food.

The set is on the expensive side, but anyone who collects LEGO animals will find it completely irresistible. ■

A newly coloured cow and new calf.

A new piglet piece.

A new lamb and woolly coat.



There's plenty going on at the farm.



**Price:** £3.49, \$4.99, €3.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** Varies

# 71034 COLLECTIBLE MINIFIGURES SERIES 23

There are costumes aplenty in the latest traditional series of LEGO minifigures

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock



**Name:** Turkey Costume

**Verdict:** Another animal costume is added to the collection just in time for Thanksgiving with a glorious new element representing the tail feathers. Hopefully this will be recoloured in future for other birds.

**Best element:** Tail feathers

**What to look for:** Tail feathers, winged torso

**Name:** Nutcracker

**Verdict:** With this being the closest wave of Collectible Minifigures to the big holiday, there are a few festive characters including Nutcracker. This fellow's cheesy smile looks excellent, the uniform is great but the hat steals the show with fine printing and attached wig. These parts will be perfect for repurposing in LEGO Pirates.

**Best element:** Hat

**What to look for:** Hat, epaulettes, cutlas



**Name:** Snowman

**Verdict:** A pleasingly simple print delivers what it needs to on the body, but the 'mask' element that covers a regular minifigure head is absolutely ingenious. There's a hole in the front deep enough for the carrot.

**Best element:** Snowman mask

**What to look for:** Mask, top hat, broom



**Name:** Reindeer Costume

**Verdict:** Why is the snowman just called Snowman, but the reindeer is called Reindeer Costume? Regardless, this fun minifigure will be a great addition to your festive display. The additional present with printed 2x2 tile top is neat too – it contains a heart-shaped cookie.

**Best element:** Reindeer mask

**What to look for:** Mask, crate, 2x2 tile



**Name:** Christmas Elf

**Verdict:** Thanks to 10245 Santa's Workshop and 10275 Elf Club House, you can never have too many of Santa's diminutive helpers – and the more variety the better. There's a new hat with pig tails on this elf and she comes with a fantastic little buildable snow globe.

**Best element:** Snow decorated dome

**What to look for:** Hat and hair, dome



**Name:** Sugar Fairy

**Verdict:** At first glance, Series 23 seems to be focused on costumed characters; but what makes this a costume rather than the real Sugar Fairy? Either way, she's a sweet minifigure with subtle but appropriate decoration plus a candy cane accessory.

**Best element:** Candy cane

**What to look for:** Wings, candy cane

**Name:** Dragon

**Verdict:** There's a recolour of Dragon Suit Guy from 2018's Series 18, with a woman's face under the hood. The minifigure was excellent then and still is now, with all of the moulded elements successfully capturing the key dragon traits.

**Best element:** Tail

**What to look for:** Wings, mask, tail



**Name:** Knight of the Yellow Castle

**Verdict:** Presumably to acknowledge the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary, this minifigure pays homage to 375 Castle. Her torso and armour feature an updated version of the crown that appeared on the shields and flags in that set. She also has a horse head accessory that demonstrates her imagining grown-up life as a knight.

**Best element:** Tiny horse head

**What to look for:** Helmet, armour, horse head



**Name:** Cardboard Robot

**Verdict:** This is a fun and colourful minifigure, but a rare miss for the designers in terms of communicating what it is. Clearly this is a robot costume, but the blue and orange colour does not scream that it is a homemade costume. If it were brown, the 'cardboard' aspect would be clearer.

**Best element:** Robot mask

**What to look for:** Mask, scissors, 2x2 tile

**Name:** Wolf Costume

**Verdict:** This Wolf Costume is good fun, nicely decorated with a tatty costume. As ever, the head mould is excellent and the tail completes the look. Rather than just add a sack accessory, the designers have gone to the trouble of printing on it – a nice bonus.

**Best element:** Wolf mask

**What to look for:** Sack, mask



**Name:** Popcorn Costume

**Verdict:** This is a tremendous outfit, perfectly executed with two distinct textures. Surprisingly, the torso underneath is plain – many of these minifigures have decoration even where it's hidden. For a second surprise, there's no accessory – you would expect a popcorn bucket for the minifigure to hold.

**Best element:** Popcorn costume

**What to look for:** Costume



**Name:** Ferry Captain

**Verdict:** This is like two minifigures for the price of one; ever since Series 1, certain minifigures have seemed like classic City minifigures upgraded to the max. Ferry Captain features arm printing and a fancy new hat. The incredible boat costume is the main attraction, yet it almost feels like a bonus. It will be worth digging out Vintage Mickey from Disney Series 2 to see how he looks wearing it.

**Best element:** Boat

**What to look for:** Boat

## VERDICT

This series lacks some variety, going almost all-in on costumes. The minifigures that are included are all excellent though, especially the festive characters.

# 75/100



# HALL OF FAME

The sets you need in your collection, according to Blocks reviewers

1

10294 Titanic

**Theme:** For Adults / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 88



That Titanic has been executed at this size with such a solid and detailed set is remarkable.

**100/100**

2

21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay

**Theme:** Ideas / **Year:** 2020 / **Issue:** 67



Combines the nostalgia of classic Pirates with a sophisticated building experience, for a true LEGO masterpiece.

**100/100**

3

10265 Ford Mustang

**Theme:** Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 55



Easily the coolest car to come out of the Creator Expert theme, the Ford Mustang fine-tunes LEGO vehicle design to perfection.

**100/100**

4

76139 1989 Batmobile

**Theme:** DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 64



An incredible way to celebrate Batman's twin anniversaries in 2019, this is the greatest LEGO Batmobile.

**99/100**

5

76391 Hogwarts Icons – Collectors' Edition

**Theme:** Wizarding World / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 83



These Harry Potter props are a delight to build, but really impress thanks to the final model's exceptional visual composition.

**99/100**

6

70620 NINJAGO City

**Theme:** The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



There are few sets that can compare to NINJAGO City's size, scope and almost overwhelming level of detail and technique.

**98/100**

7

10257 Carousel

**Theme:** Creator Expert / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 34



This welcome addition to LEGO fairgrounds is a work of art, and far more detailed than its much-revered predecessor.

**98/100**

8

21317 Steamboat Willie

**Theme:** Ideas / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 56



This monochromatic blast from Disney's past doesn't need any sprinkling of pixie dust, as it's pure magic from start to finish.

**98/100**

9

70904 Clayface Splat Attack

**Theme:** The LEGO Batman Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 28



A creative and effective build that ensures a wide and valid appeal. Proof that great things come in small packages.

**98/100**

10

75313 AT-AT

**Theme:** Star Wars / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 87



The Ultimate Collector Series AT-AT justifies its incredible piece count and delivers a toy that lives up to what fans have dreamed of.

**97/100**



11

## 71741 NINJAGO City Gardens

Theme: NINJAGO / Year: 2021 / Issue: 77



This beautiful and detailed model is a worthy follow-up to 70620 NINJAGO City, using its incredible piece count to excellent effect.

97/100

12

## 70618 Destiny's Bounty

Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / Year: 2017 / Issue: 36



A highly detailed and exquisitely-designed vessel (with not a moulded hull in sight) for the full roster of ninja to enjoy.

97/100

13

## 10305 Lion Knights' Castle

Theme: Icons / Year: 2022 / Issue: 94



Nostalgia and history combine for a beautiful set that demands to be played with.

96/100

14

## 10497 Galaxy Explorer

Theme: Icons / Year: 2022 / Issue: 94



The size of 10497 Galaxy Explorer has been increased to make every adult who builds it feel like a child again – and it succeeds.

96/100

15

## 75192 Millennium Falcon

Theme: Star Wars / Year: 2017 / Issue: 40



A nearly perfect immortalisation of the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy – as long as you can stomach the size and price.

96/100

16

## 10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander

Theme: Creator Expert / Year: 2019 / Issue: 58



A timely and worthy celebration of a historic event, the Lunar Lander is a stunning display piece and rewarding build.

96/100

17

## 80105 Chinese New Year Temple Fair

Theme: Seasonal / Year: 2019 / Issue: 65



This is a beautifully-presented set with no cut corners, no lack of attention to detail, and absolutely no reason to not pick it up.

96/100

18

## 76052 Batman Classic TV Series – Batcave

Theme: DC Super Heroes / Year: 2016 / Issue: 19



Offers an unrivalled Bat-experience, with plenty of Bat-love having gone into the Bat-design phase. Did we mention Bats?

96/100

19

## 70841 Benny's Space Squad

Theme: The LEGO Movie 2 / Year: 2019 / Issue: 53



The question isn't whether you should buy this colourful celebration of Classic Space, but how many copies is enough.

96/100

20

## 10274 Ghostbusters ECTO-1

Theme: Ghostbusters / Year: 2020 / Issue: 75



A fantastic build experience that leads to a superb display set. I ain't afraid of no complex techniques.

95/100



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# THE LORD OF POTTER WARS

Kevin Ulrich has tackled many major franchises in his incredibly well-executed stop motion LEGO brickfilms

**Words:** Anthony Walker-Cook **Pics:** Brotherhood Workshop

A wizard's staff  
is a prized  
possession.



Kevin and younger brother Brian with childhood bricks.



Kevin working on a clay animation project.



Setting up for shooting.



Problems during battle.



**H**AVE YOU EVER wanted to see Admiral Ackbar from the Star Wars universe recount the movie events in the style of a YouTube reaction channel? Or perhaps you've wondered about the true reason behind Saruman's turn to evil in The Lord of the Rings? Maybe you've envisaged how Dolores Umbridge's first date went in the Wizarding World? Thanks to the brickfilms that Brotherhood Workshop has produced over the years, you can enjoy all of these untold stories.

There are few stop motion brickfilms that can simultaneously be intricately detailed and large in scope, yet since 2012 Brotherhood Workshop has been achieving just that. Over the years, director Kevin Ulrich has made brickfilms set in the Star Wars, Harry Potter and Middle-earth universes, among many others, with charm, wit and a penchant for focusing on the 'bad guys'.

Like many fans, Kevin's memories with LEGO bricks go back to his childhood.

He lived in Germany between the ages of two and five years old and LEGOLAND Billund was his first experience of a theme park. 6252 Sea Mates was the first set he remembers picking out at a shop (he wanted the monkey piece) but even early on he recognised the creative possibilities that bricks could offer. 'I loved that all LEGO bricks were compatible and that every time I bought a set, it increased the potential for building a cooler and bigger world,' he says.

The hobby continued to grow from there. There's little thematic

consistency to the sets that Kevin recalls as childhood favourites – he lists 6983 Ice Station Odyssey, 6082 Fire Breathing Fortress, 6442 Sting Ray Explorer and 6584 Extreme Team Challenge – but what they offered was an opportunity for the young builder to create 'a miniature world where my imagination could run wild.'

Indeed, creative stories were at the heart of this imaginative experimentation. Kevin explains: 'Often when my brothers and I were playing with LEGO bricks, I would act as a sort of dungeon master, guiding their characters to follow a plot that I had pre-determined. At other times I would set up scenes and then proudly show my parents, explaining the story being conveyed by the static – yet dramatic – set ups.'

Things changed when, aged 11, Kevin saw 1349 Steven Spielberg Moviemaker Set advertised. He was inspired and used his dad's old Handycam to make brickfilms (later buying 1349 on clearance). For several years he created brickfilms set around his favourite

themes at the time (which included Adventurers, Rock Raiders, Alpha Team and Star Wars). These videos are not available on YouTube – in fact, they're on VHS tapes and Kevin assures Blocks that they are 'definitely not worth watching' – but they did provide him with an opportunity to hone his skills and see his early creative visions come to life. 'I no longer had to verbally tell people stories or explain to them what was happening in a setup. I could create actual movies to show what was happening in my head,' he says enthusiastically.

## I COULD CREATE ACTUAL MOVIES TO SHOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN MY HEAD



This is  
a good  
sword.



That Spielberg set had confirmed for the young brick fan that he wanted to make films, but it took him in a new direction – he moved into clay animation, also known as claymation, and away from LEGO bricks in the hope that his filmmaking would be taken seriously, and so began his dark age.

A 30-minute claymation feature (titled Chaisson: Rise of the Zerad) followed, but it didn't quite launch Kevin's filmmaking career in the way he wanted. After some corporate work, however, he convinced a boss to let him set up a stop motion studio in the office. This fortunately coincided with the launch of the LEGO The Lord of the Rings line in 2012. Tolkien's world always had an appeal. 'Middle-earth feels more like home than the real world – and the more often I can visit, the happier I am,' Kevin explains. The first LEGO video on the Brotherhood Workshop channel today is a short parody in which Aragorn's battle with the Uruk-Hai at Amon Hen is retold as an actor's aggressive rampage at adoring fans.

It would be the first of many brickfilms set in Middle-earth that often focus on the Orcs or Uruk-Hai. In another video, Kevin shows that the reason the Cave Troll is so angry in the Mines of Moria is because the armour that Pippin accidentally knocks down the well disrupts the troll's birthday party; in another brickfilm Aragorn again is the enemy when he humiliates a lovelorn goblin. The alternative perspective on Tolkien's 'evil' creatures in these videos came from the orc minifigures. 'They didn't look

like vicious man-eating monsters, they looked adorable! How could those blocky little pug faces be evil?' asks Kevin.

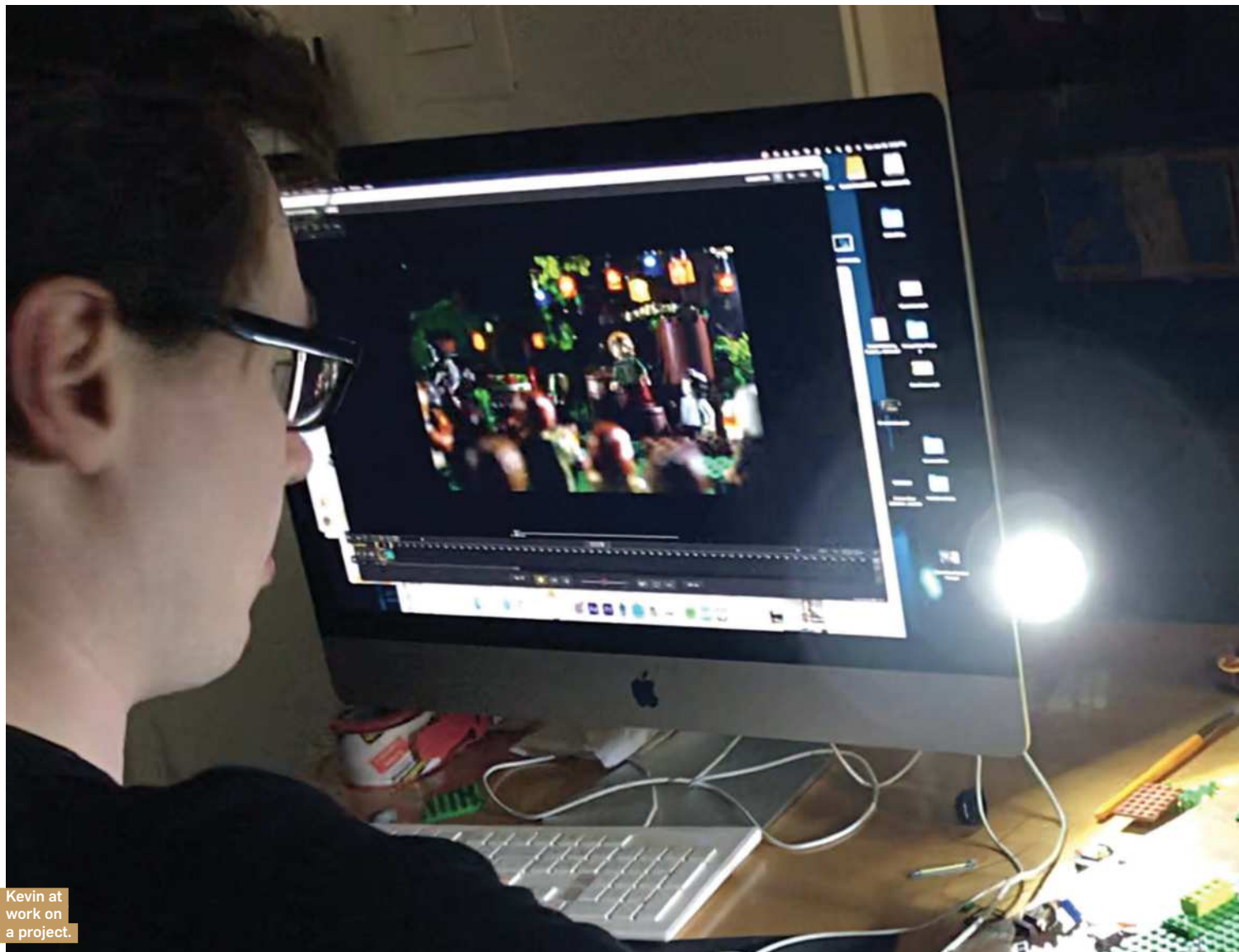
The scope of his videos steadily grew throughout 2013 and 2014, then his first collaboration with the LEGO Group came in 2014 with LEGO The Hobbit – Dwarven Dreams. Slightly later videos showed the Cave Troll going toe-to-toe with the Goblin King, the Battle of Helm's Deep and the (accidental) destruction of the Tower of Isengard – but there were also smaller vignettes, like Voldemort going wand shopping in Ollivander's only to get wrecked by Gandalf.

These videos were building up to The Aggravation of Smaug, which was commissioned by the LEGO Group and had the story approved by Warner Brothers, released in 2014. Across 4 minutes and 30 seconds, viewers are taken on a massive journey across the various environments of the Hobbit

story as Smaug furiously chases Bilbo after the excitable Hobbit wakes the dragon from his slumber – Smaug disrupts the Necromancer in Dol Guldur and gives the people of Laketown a shock before being captured by the plucky dwarves. The achievement behind such a feat should not be underestimated – Kevin notes that every 60 seconds of finished video takes around 100 hours of work to complete, which contextualises the effort behind even his shortest videos.

Of course, some videos take more time, and others take less, with an example of the former being Chirrut Versus Everything, which was

**MIDDLE-EARTH FEELS MORE LIKE HOME THAN THE REAL WORLD – AND THE MORE OFTEN I CAN VISIT, THE HAPPIER I AM**



Kevin at work on a project.



Marvel's Civil War in LEGO form.

## FIVE MUST-WATCH BRICKFILMS

Here are Blocks magazine's picks from Brotherhood Workshop's back catalogue

### CHIRRUT VERSUS EVERYTHING

[bit.ly/3z0CjOK](http://bit.ly/3z0CjOK)

Just when you think this video cannot get bigger and more exciting, it does. The animation as Chirrut cuts through waves of the Empire's forces is super impressive, but the video kicks into overdrive with its final duel – a must-see video for stop motion and LEGO Star Wars fans alike.



### LEGO THE BATTLE OF HELMS DEEP

[bit.ly/3z4gX2H](http://bit.ly/3z4gX2H)  
If you want an introduction to the tone and style of the Brotherhood Workshop,

this is it – the battle of Helms Deep is recreated in incredible detail but with a humorous thread running throughout. Of course, Legolas gets his own incredibly athletic moment doing some improbable stunts, which are no doubt incredibly tricky to create in brick form.

### THIS IS A GOOD SWORD

[bit.ly/3z1uoR9](http://bit.ly/3z1uoR9)

The short skits from the Brotherhood Workshop are often a treat, and this is a good example. Aragorn's consoling of a young warrior before the battle of Helms Deep becomes a moment of comedy when he takes the lad's sword, but watch the frenetic action in the background – there's no shortcuts even in the shorter videos.



### LEGO CIVIL WAR: ANT-MAN VS IRON MAN

[bit.ly/3RWVama](http://bit.ly/3RWVama)  
Captain America: Civil War might feel like a big movie, but it's got

nothing on this brickfilm. Antman (or, really, Giantman) goes toe-to-toe with Iron Man in a gritty fight, but before that you get a hint of all of the super heroes fighting. We've all had epic battles with our minifigures, but to see them rendered in such a filmic way is impressive.

### HARRY POTTER IN 90 SECONDS

[bit.ly/3RjQx4B](http://bit.ly/3RjQx4B)

The title gives it away, but it's incredibly impressive that in 90 seconds an entire franchise is condensed in a way that still makes sense. This is typical Brotherhood Workshop content, jam-packed with details and action.





Mandrake preparations.



Baby Yoda visits the Mos Eisley Cantina.



The Ghostbusters save the day at Minas Tirith.



Gandalf vs Voldemort - an epic showdown.



xx x x x x x  
xxx xx xx  
xx xxx

Obi-Wan has been discovered.



A terrifying ride.



released in 2017 and was sponsored by the popular How It Should Have Ended YouTube channel. As per the title, the video sees Chirrut Îmwe from *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* fighting all and sundry, and took around 500 hours to complete. Kevin describes it as his 'most intricate and ridiculous fight scene to date'; when asked if he's got something bigger planned, he remains secretive.

If there are more than 50 minifigures on the screen, then it can take more than 40 hours to produce just four seconds of content; the current Brotherhood Workshop record is having 230 minifigures on screen at one time in a pre-YouTube video. Equally impressive is the way in which Kevin has developed a distinctly speedy style of storytelling – LEGO *The Hobbit* in 72 Seconds astonishingly condenses Tolkien's book into a cogent 72 seconds, a remarkable feat given that it took Peter Jackson 474 minutes to tell the same story.

This is clearly work that takes time, and like many YouTubers, Kevin relies on sponsorships from other companies as a way of making his creative work sustainable – he's worked with the LEGO Group, How It Should Have Ended and NordVPN, among others. These sponsorships fund Kevin's work, but they have other benefits, including increasing his potential audience. The YouTube channel where it all began has become a portfolio where the creative can advertise his skills and a space where he can share his own passion projects.

For those aspiring to make brickfilms, Kevin offers two pieces of advice. 'Start off with something simple and see if you enjoy the process. Don't worry about being "good" right away. That comes with practice. And if you aren't finding joy in the work from the very beginning, you won't put in the

necessary practice to become good.

'Secondly, learn to use the tools you already have before you spend a lot of money buying better tools. For my first eight years as an animator, I was shooting on a Handycam with no computer connection. It was only later that I started purchasing expensive equipment like laptops and DSLRs. Focus on what you have, not what you don't have.'

But Kevin doesn't hide the tips and tricks that have come over the past 10 years. He has shared several behind-the-scenes videos via the Brotherhood Workshop channel. 'Animation has brought a lot of joy to my own life, and if my work inspires others to try it out themselves, I believe their lives will be better for it.'

## ■ ■ START OFF WITH SOMETHING SIMPLE AND SEE IF YOU ENJOY THE PROCESS ■ ■

The speculation surrounding new licence reveals offers Kevin a constant source of excitement, both personally as a LEGO fan and creatively as a brickfilmer. He is hoping for the return of the Indiana Jones theme as he missed out on the first iteration when he was in

his dark age. Some of his earliest brickfilms used Johnny Thunder sets to capture that Indy magic.

At the time of writing, Brotherhood Workshop has more than 274,000 YouTube channel subscribers. No doubt the young fan who realised that he could turn the creative visions in his head into real-life stories with LEGO bricks would be incredibly excited to discover what lay in store; not only have several of his videos attained more than a million views on YouTube but his interest in LEGO sets has remained suitably varied. Kevin's videos remind viewers that, with LEGO creativity, the imagination can truly run wild – whatever comes next from this prolific animator, it will be worth watching. ■



Inside the mountain of Erebor.



## KEY



1X1 CLIP  
PLATE  
HORIZONTAL



1X1 CLIP  
PLATE  
VERTICAL



1X1 ROUND



1X1 TILE WITH  
CLIP



1X2 PLATE



1X4 BAR



1X4 TO 2X2  
HINGE PLATE



1X6 BAR



1X6 CHAIN



2X2 BRACKET  
DOWNWARD



2X2 BRACKET  
UPWARD



4X4 ROUND  
PLATE



2X2 TILE



2X4 PLATE



4 BAR AXEL  
CONNECTOR



BAR HOLDER  
WITH CLIP



BUCKET WITH  
HANDLE



CHEESE  
SLOPE

# WELL OF CREATIVITY

Help grant your minifigures' wishes with these drinking well techniques

Words & Pics: Simon Pickard



**IF YOU'RE BUILDING** something historical or rural, a drinking well is a great way to add a hint of everyday life to a scene. Perhaps you have some fields or a barn in your layout and need a little something to provide a point of interest – a well could be the way to go.

While the designs shown here can be directly copied, it is important to explore the technical concepts behind them. The ideas offered up demonstrate the techniques you can use to maximise your creative options.

## LEARNING FROM LEGO SETS

The LEGO Group employs very talented designers who implement excellent design solutions, which can then easily be incorporated into alternative creations. 31120 Medieval Castle and 21325 Medieval Blacksmith both contain creative well designs.

The macaroni piece, a slang term famously utilised in *The LEGO Movie*, is

the bedrock component for well designs. The four together provide a perfectly serviceable wall size and opening for the water to be retrieved. It's interesting that this well has no cover, as many wells – even those with roof coverings – had a wooden lid that could be placed over the opening.

The simple solution here perfectly depicts what is needed, although the bucket does seem somewhat out of place. There are now smaller pieces that can be utilised as buckets when looking to create a more unique version of this particular design.

The design for the blacksmith's well utilises a more modern range of LEGO pieces. The doughnut plate provides the same size of circle as the macaroni pieces. This means that the two ideas can be merged together as desired.

The middle layer of this design utilises the oval plate to provide an element of texturing to the well's wall. The green doughnut plate seems a little out of place,

however there is often moss build up around wells.

The roof covering is the most striking part of this design. The round tile with bar combined with the bar holder and clip ensure a much thinner connection for the winch bar. This enables the hole to look more suitable, emphasised further by the better placement of the bucket. There is no rotation on this bar approach, which allows the connection of the roof approach to finish it off beautifully.

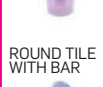
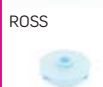
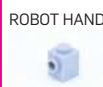
## KEY CONCEPTS

Simple design is often the best approach when key features are properly picked out and presented together. Standard round pieces can connect straight onto the desired terrain, making them easy to install on any model. The curved and round pieces used here provided an ideal scaling and starting point for creations that feature minifigures.





## KEY



## OVAL PLATE REVOLUTION

The oval plate has offered a new curving wall option that can get much tighter than the use of hinges or the use of round and rectangular plate strips. In this design the layers are made up of only five plates. While it is obviously possible to make this design larger it is presented here in the smallest variation that still maintains a circular appearance.

An additional bonus of the oval plate are the full stud holes, which all align underneath too. This allows the installation of bars that can increase or decrease the height of the roof section as desired, while still utilising the bar holder with clip (as seen in the Medieval Blacksmith set).

The roof utilises the corner davross to hold the two sides of the structure together at right angles. The remaining stud on each side allows for decorative or functional connections as needed. Note also the inclusion of a polo so that the robot hands can be

installed as attachments onto the well's bar.

This well introduces the idea of a line for the bucket. The chain pieces have holes in their studs, enabling easy connection onto the cross bar. The inclusion of the four bar piece on the end gives the well a greater sense of function. You'll notice that the very top of the roof is achieved by laying four bars into the ridge. The clip plates on the end help keep these from sliding off.

This design does not fit onto a studded grid. This requires a layer of tiles underneath with one or two studs exposed so that just one of the oval plates is connected.

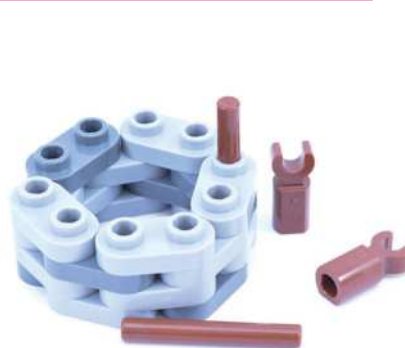
## KEY CONCEPT

Oval plates offer a wide variety of size options while also adding texture to the side walls. Different colours, shades and shapes improves the texturing further. The bar and clip system offers a variety of supportive connections and shaping possibilities.

The curved edges allow a circular shape.



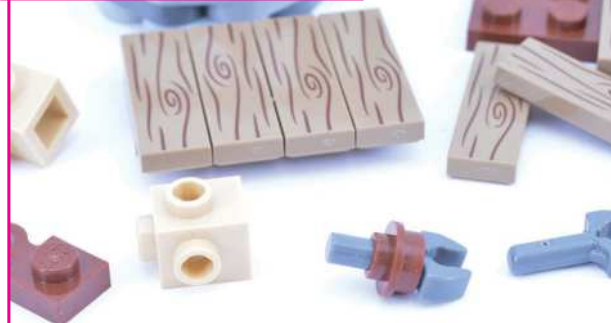
Stud holes allow variation in the height of the bars.



A simple winch system helps the final effect.



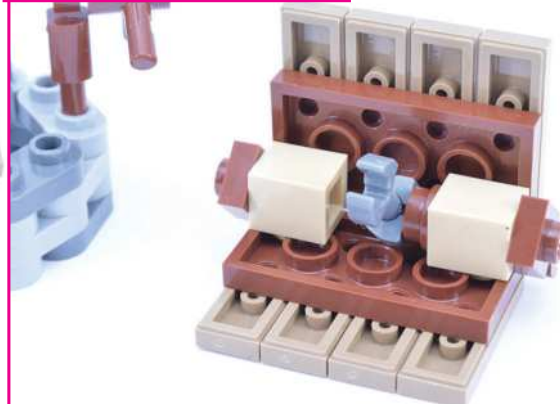
Side studs help secure the roof together.



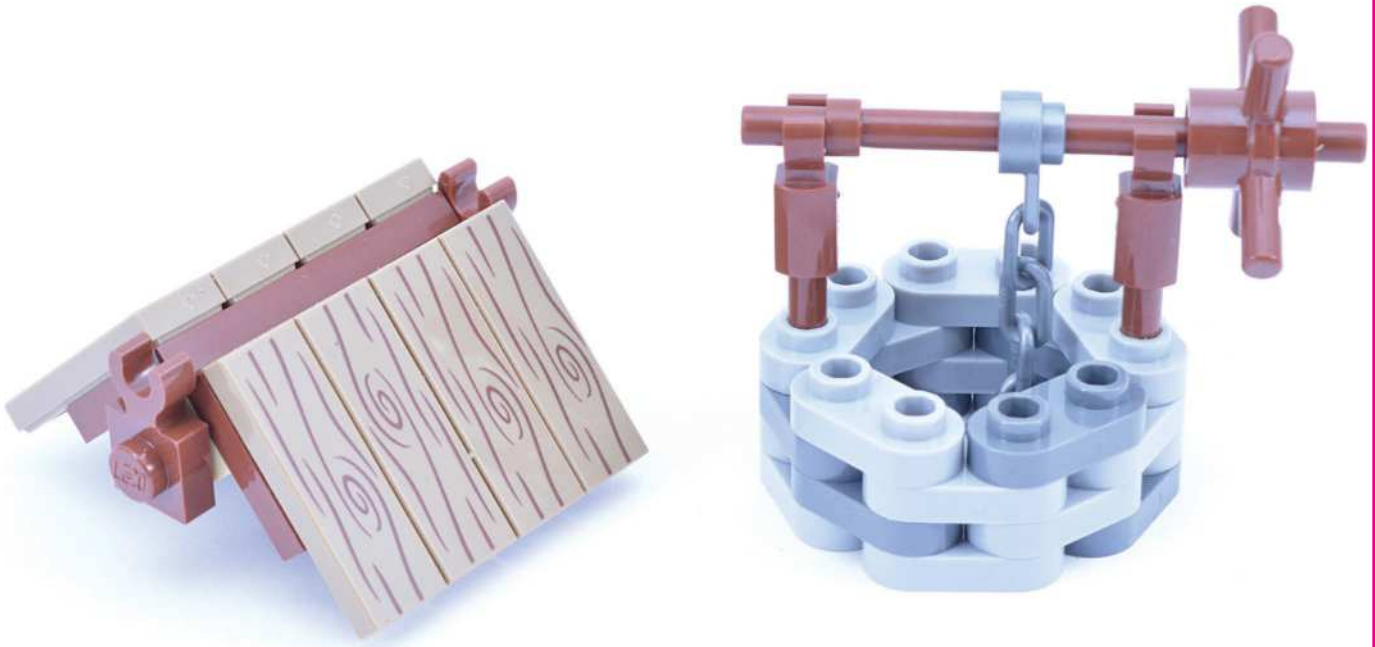
The polo is needed to secure the robot hands.



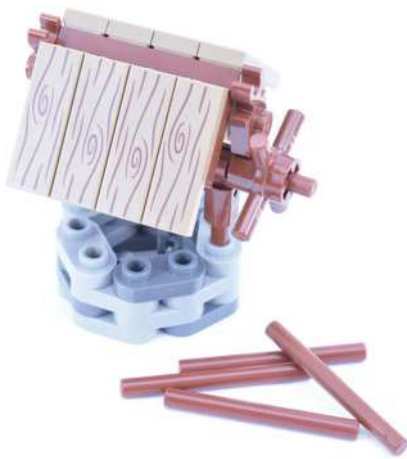
Exposed studs at both ends are useful.



Bar and clips secure the roof and winch.



The top is finished off with loose bars.



You can misalign tiles for a more textured roof.



The clip helps keep the bars from sliding out.





## HINGED APPROACH

This design approach is achieved by utilising the 1x4 to 2x2 split hinge plate. The size of the circle is 16 studs. Anything smaller and you lose the circular shaping. You can try to overcome this with the slope technique in the next section.

The added variety of part shapes helps to make this the most textured approach shown here. Note how the hinges are not all at the same height – this allows the round plates and masonry bricks to fit in at different points for further texture.

The roof of this well uses the same core idea as the oval plate version. However, this time the bricks are further from the edge, allowing for the clip tiles that can then directly connect to the upright bars. The top part is filled in by round bricks. Using a Technic pin with stud in the middle

ensures a connection point at each end for the finishing details. The roof is then secured into place using the stud holes in jumper plates.

For the winch aspect, this design utilises a straight droid arm piece. This allows the bucket to be suspended in the presentation rather than obscured as in the previous approaches.

## KEY CONCEPT

Split hinge plates are a very robust and secure way of creating a circular wall. The larger roof size enables much greater texturing and shaping than other options. There are lots of short clip pieces that can hold the bucket above the well as desired. There are lots of stud hole elements now, allowing for thinner posts for the well winch and roof.

Vary the height of the hinges.



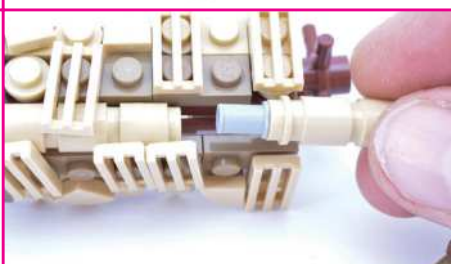
The hinges pull round for a curve.



Jumper plates will secure the roof.



This roof has a tile with clip at each end.



A Technic pin allows for a stud at both ends.



Note the imperfect connections adding texture.



A straight droid arm acts as the winch rope.

## SLOPED CONNECTION

Slopes provide another option in shaping the walls of a well. Cheese slopes are the key element for creating the well shown here. This piece can also prove useful in plugging gaps in larger well designs. You can upscale this concept using larger slope pieces, however this one shows the possibility for designing smaller well openings.

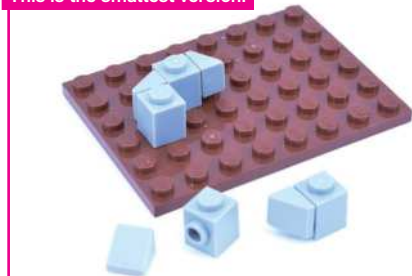
Slopes are available in different angles, sizes and gradients, including curved slopes. These can be utilised on larger designs, such as those shown here. The final section shows how some of these can be implemented in the terrain as well.

The polo and robot arm pieces demonstrate another approach to the cross bar and roof support. Given its smaller stature, the roof is not physically attached to the well. The 1x1 tile with clip still provides an important function – the roof rests in place thanks to this component.

## KEY CONCEPT

Slopes provide shaping options for curvatures in a wall. Smaller models often require more creative connections or unsecured approaches such as the roof resting in place here. Identifying the key features in small designs ensures they appear as you intend.

This is the smallest version.



Polos and robot hands keep the size down.



The roof utilises a different bracket.



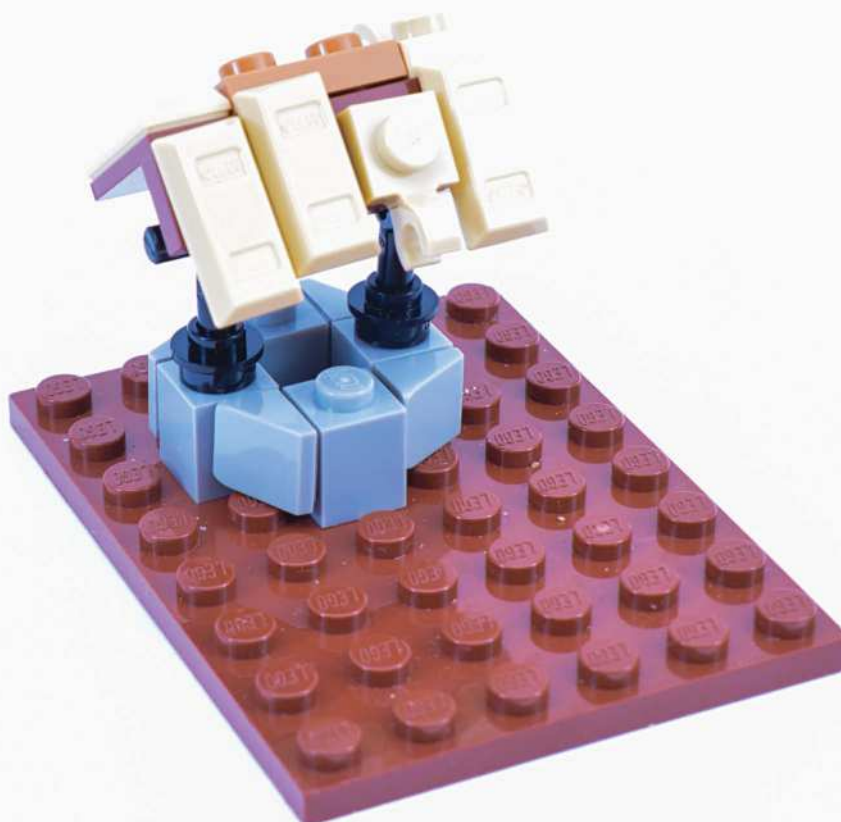
The roof will sit on the tile with clip.



Texture is possible even on a small scale build.



Different colours imply different materials.



The ingots can be higher or lower.



## EMBEDDING THE WELLS

It is possible to create wells that drop deeper into the terrain, not simply sitting on top, so the well looks deep inside and is flush to the ground on the outer section. This uses the oval plate design, with studs in one location and the rest tiled over.

Black tiles help give the model depth beyond the base and this approach is limited only by the height chosen for the terrain layer. The more difficult aspect is bringing the terrain smoothly up to the edges of the circular well.

In the first instance, slopes can be used on their sides. There is a stone

path, grass and mud around the edges in the example shown here. The large areas use a 1x2 slope with the small sections using cheese slopes. All of these are layered in on their sides loosely. The remaining gaps around the wall are obscured by plant elements.

## KEY CONCEPT

The primary technique for introducing off grid and unusually shaped components to creations is knowing how to approach filling in and obscuring the gaps that such designs create. ■

Deeper wells need a higher ground level.



Tiles and one stud allow for the round shape.



Big gaps are filled in with slopes and tiles.



Smaller gaps are filled in with plant pieces.



Leaf elements disguise the joins.



The completed build.

# FLIPPER

No need to dive to the bottom of the ocean for this great concept

**Words:** Simon Pickard **Pics:** The LEGO Group

**LEGO DESIGNERS DESERVE** a lot credit for their creativity, even under the restrictions that are necessary for their models to meet commercial needs and play standards. 31132 Viking Ship and the Midgard Serpent offers a chance to see how much you can learn from the experts in Billund when it comes to inventive and creative part usage.

LEGO Creator sets have been a great standard bearer for brick-built animals over the years. It is no easy task creating animals that look at home in a minifigure environment, but the results are often inspiring.

Building one such animal demonstrates the use of the flipper that is usually attached to a diver's foot. Taking a close look at the crows, perched on the ship's mast; there are two crows

with folded back wings. These are in fact the part in question! This is not the only place they are used, as they can also be spotted forming the gills of the sea serpent.

## THIS LEGO SET HAS LOTS OF EDUCATIONAL TOUCHES THAT INSPIRE CREATIVE PART USAGE

This LEGO set has lots of educational touches that inspire creative part usage. There are two more particular stand outs in this creation. The eye of the serpent is achieved by using an

obscuring technique, so that we only see the tip of the transparent orange piece, while the rigging is secured at the top of the mast post with a Racers steering wheel.

Less obvious, but equally valuable for learning, is the shaping of the boat's figure head. The changes of stud direction are exquisite but the standout area is the lower jaw. This is a reversed half bow that is attached into the centre base of a 1x2 brick.

Other LEGO sets are packed full of inspiration as to how elements can interact and fit together. It is well worth taking the time to look at official set designs and notice the details to spur on the creative mind and expand your own piece perception. ■



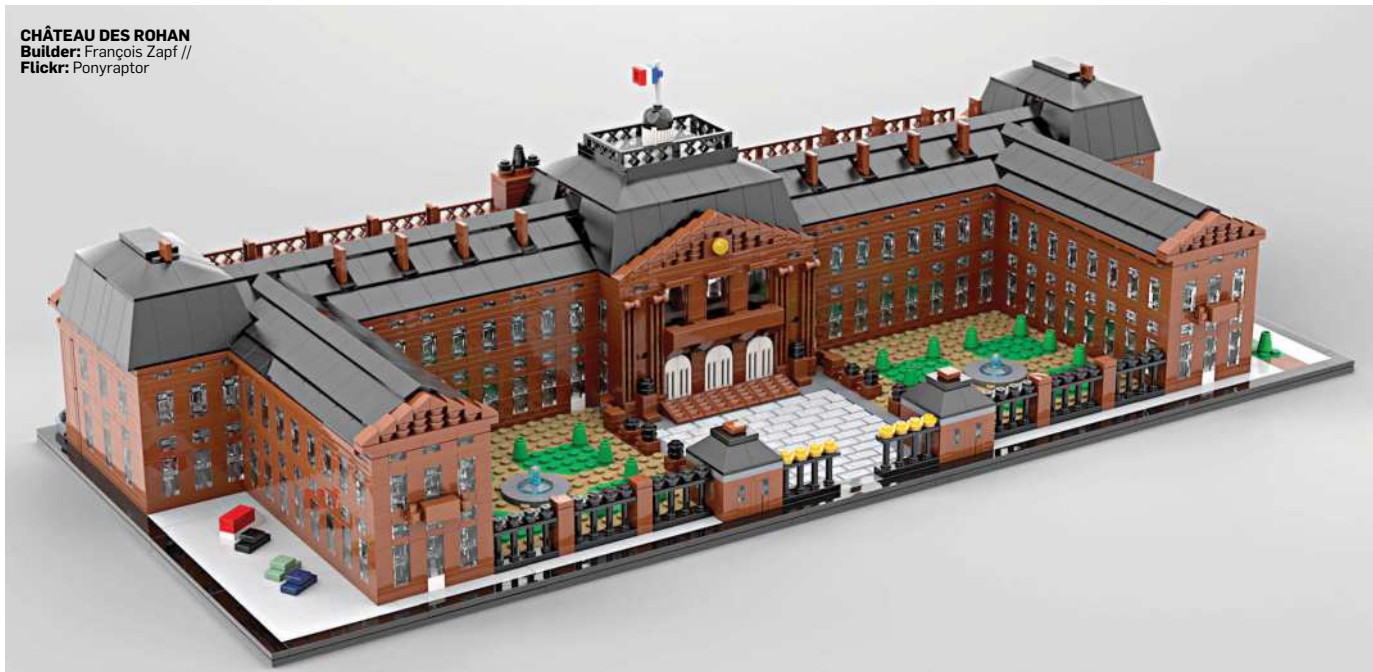


# BLOCKS MOCS //

The latest selection of MOCs that have caught the attention of the Blocks team

## CHÂTEAU DES ROHAN

Builder: François Zapf // Flickr: Ponyraptor



## VÅSTERBOTTENSGÅRD

Builder: Emma Widmark // Flickr: Emma Widmark



## EL CAMINO

Builder: James Bush // Instagram: IBrickedItUp



## ENCANTO MADRIGAL HOUSE

Builder: Ben Pitchford // Flickr: Ben Pitchford



## BURGER JOINT

Builder: Andrea Lattanzio // Flickr: Norton74



# MOC&A // X-VIPER

What do you get when you combine an X-wing with a Blacktron fighter?

**Word:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Julius Kanand

**LEGO FANS LOVE** creating new builds set in the worlds of classic themes. In the case of the X-Viper, Julius Kanand wanted to not just visit the Blacktron universe, but bring in some tech from a galaxy far, far away. This fun build combines black, white and transparent neon green for a really fun and swooshable spaceship.

## **Blocks: What is your experience with Blacktron?**

**Julius:** Blacktron was one of my favourite LEGO themes that I owned a few sets of when I was growing up. I love the colour palette and

trans neon green is still my favourite LEGO colour of all time.

## **What was the inspiration for this build?**

I am a big fan of the X-wing design and it just makes for such an awesome play feature. I wanted to spice up the drab Star Wars colour palette and include the iconic X-wing wings, then add fire power. A Vic-Viper was my very first AFOL Space MOC and I was keen to build another one so I figured I should throw in the Vic-Viper wing setup.

## **What were the challenges in combining the two concepts?**

Choosing a cockpit that left room for the wings and prongs to shine was a bit of a challenge. However, I'm quite pleased how the elevated detachable bubble escape-pod cockpit turned out in the end.

## **What are you happiest with about the finished build?**

I like the overall low profile of the ship's body and the very atypical position of the cockpit gives this build a very unique character. ■

■ I WANTED TO SPICE UP THE DRAB STAR WARS COLOUR PALETTE ■



**X-VIPER**

**Builder:** Julius Kanand // **Flickr:** Julius Kanand



# MOC IN PICS //

## ADVENTURERS BIPLANE

A classic aircraft inspired by a classic theme takes flight in this convincing recreation

**Word & Pics:** Olav Grimstad

**AS A BIG** fan of the Adventurers theme, I was in the process of building several vehicles fit for the 1930s, so I just had to do a bi-wing plane as well. This Adventurers biplane, piloted by the

iconic Harry Cane, is inspired by several different biplanes that appeared throughout the four Adventurers subthemes from 1998 to 2003, as well as Indiana Jones. The main inspiration was

set 7420 Thunder Blazer from Orient Expedition, a set I played with a lot growing up. The model has gone through several design iterations, until I finally reached a design I was satisfied with. ■

The choice to use sand green wings was not intentional – it was the only colour I had enough curved slopes of, and luckily it fit well.

The biplane has a rear machine gun, like the one seen in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

The biplane has a rotating rudder.

I used several pieces that appeared in the Adventurers theme, like the transparent windshield and the brown propeller.

I cut flex tubes to get bars in the right length for the landing gear and the support structures between the wings.

The base of the model was built for display at the Norwegian convention På Kloss Hold, as I wanted to display the biplane in action soaring through the sky.



# MOC&A // ALLIED INTELLIGENCE OFFICE

Bluecoats and Redcoats are teaming up in this LEGO Pirates build

**Word:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Evan Crouch

**WHEN DESIGNING THIS** LEGO Pirates build, Evan Crouch managed to think about how it would integrate into a collaborative layout whilst also finding a way to tie it into a building game he was participating in online. Evan explains to Blocks how he balanced both when he teamed up the two Imperial factions.

**Blocks: What is your favourite LEGO Pirates set?**

**Evan:** My favourite growing up was the Redcoats' 6277 Imperial Trading Post. I had so much fun playing pirates with my brother and sister. My brother would be the pirates and I'd be the Imperials.

**What was the inspiration for this build? Where did you start?**

This build was created on a MILS (Modular Integrated Landscaping System) plate for an upcoming convention in Denver, CO. It will be joined with a few dozen other builds from

CoWLUG and DENLUG to create a big banner message. Because it needed to be on a 32x32 baseplate and had specific height requirements, I started with the ocean and shore landscape and then planned out how high the building

**■ WITH SUCH A SMALL FOOTPRINT, I TRIED TO INCLUDE AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE ■**

would need to be. I participate in the Brethren of the Brick Seas building game on EuroBricks and figured I could cross-list this build with an ongoing story there, so I featured Redcoats and Bluecoats working together. With such a small footprint, I tried to include as much detail as possible at every turn!

**Were there any challenges in building this MOC?**

Because this build will transport to an in-person convention, I wanted to make sure the sloped walls and 'claw' palm tree were very secure and sturdy. I played around a number of different clip techniques to make them both rock solid. There is significant weight on top of the sloped walls, but they don't support it – there is an internal brick structure.

**What are you most happy with about the finished build?**

I'm really happy with how the ramshackle rope bridge turned out. It is attached with clips on a string with grips on it, which allows it to be sturdily joined to the rest of the build at crazy angles. ■

The island will be part of a larger layout.



**ALLIED INTELLIGENCE OFFICE**  
Builder: Evan Crouch // Flickr: Evancelt Lego



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## REWIND



## AQUASHARKS

It wasn't just the Aquanauts who were hunting precious crystals in the mid-1990s – their shark-loving rivals were also after the shiny pieces

**Words:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, Brickset

**AQUAZONE IS AN** interesting theme in the LEGO Group's portfolio. The underwater sci-fi range arrived in 1995 and marks a point of transition, as the designers started to imbue more direct story into the themes that they were developing.

The reason it's a transitional theme though is because that story still wasn't overt – in many ways, Aquazone delivered the same basic conflict play that could be found in Space, Castle and Pirates at this point. In yellow and blue submarines, the Aquanauts were coded as being on the side of good; the Aquasharks however were very clearly the bad guys, revealed through their black and orange vessels.

Where the story came into play was in the reason for their conflict. A new element was introduced – officially known as 'rock 1x1 crystal 5 point' – and there was no doubt that it was precious, because it was shiny. Both the Aquanauts and the Aquasharks were seeking out these crystals; what makes the Aquasharks the villains rather than the heroes is unclear, so if you prefer orange and black then perhaps you can flip the narrative. The concept of two sides fighting for a specific object of desire is one that the LEGO Group has returned to time after time and was considered a vital

element in the early success of NINJAGO.

Many of the pieces the theme used were shared between both factions. A system of arm pieces finally reached its full potential as it allowed the vessels to have posable grabbers, with magnets repurposed from other themes on the end. These could then grab the crates that also had magnets attached with a satisfying thud.

There were a few bespoke elements for the Aquasharks though, with cockpits specially printed with aggressive shark motifs. There's the sinister and toothy shark face, the aggressive shark above a cross and a more functional looking piece. Because these parts were clearly intended to go a long way, they crop up in most of the sets and clearly limited the design team's options somewhat.

Space had offered sci-fi for years, but what Aquazone provided was a completely different take on a futuristic world. Thanks to their over the top, almost cartoony vessels, the Aquasharks were the perfect villains to disrupt the Aquanauts' operations. Bad guys in black may be a cliché, but it can be an awfully fun cliché.







## MEMORY LANE

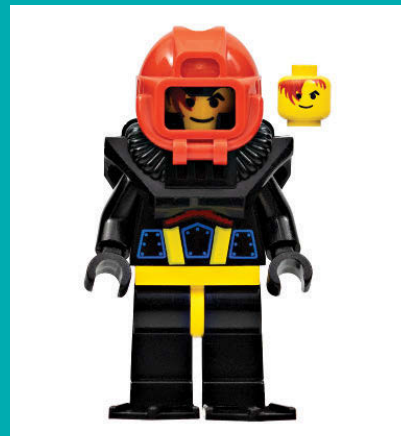
'IT WAS THE AQUASHARKS WHO HAD THE COOLEST SUBS AND THE ONE I WAS MOST TAKEN BY'

GRAHAM FOUND THE VILLAINS TO BE THE MOST APPEALING PART OF AQUAZONE

The distinctness of Aquazone was definitely part of its appeal for me – it was so far removed from the already existing themes of 1995 that it demanded my young attention. While the Aquanauts themselves were appealing, it was the Aquasharks who had the coolest subs and the one I was most taken by. 6155 Deep Sea Predator had such an appealing look, capturing the shape of a shark in a striking black-orange-blue colour scheme, that I couldn't help but start pestering my parents for these new sci-fi sets.

When that pestering had paid off (or more likely I had patiently waited for a birthday), I still remember the excitement of getting the bricks out of my first box from the theme. The shiny arrows! The crystals! The magnets! The arms! The new parts were incredibly exciting and really reinforced how fresh and new these sets were. Many happy hours were spent swooshing 6155 Deep Sea Predator.

## BREAKING DOWN THE THEME



- The Aquasharks minifigure with a hook is named Thresher.
- Chrome knives came in pairs to detach from a central sprue.
- In 1997, the Aquasharks were replaced by the Aquaraiders.



## MEMORY LANE

'I VIVIDLY REMEMBER SEEING 6155 DEEP SEA PREDATOR FOR THE FIRST TIME AND HAVING TROUBLE PROCESSING IT'

FOR DANIEL, IT WAS THE AQUASHARKS THAT DREW HIM INTO THE AQUAZONE THEME

A new LEGO theme was a huge novelty in 1995. It had been six years since LEGO Pirates hit shelves in 1989 and joined Town, Space and Castle to bring the total number of LEGO themes up to four when out of nowhere came a fifth – Aquazone. I vividly remember seeing 6155 Deep Sea Predator for the first time and having trouble processing it. A new theme? An underwater LEGO setting? I was instantly smitten and diligently set to work saving the \$20 needed to buy, what was then, the largest Aquasharks set. It took months, but I got that sub followed soon thereafter by the smaller Shark Scout. Having the bad guys meant I needed good guys for them to harass so, just as the LEGO Group intended, I asked for the Aquanauts sets for the birthdays and Christmases that followed.

BY THE NUMBERS  
YEARS ACTIVE:

1995-1996

5  
SETS

3

ACTUAL SHARKS ACROSS THE SETS

6

AQUASHARKS DIVERS ACROSS THE SETS

258

PIECES IN 6190 SHARK'S CRYSTAL CAVE, THE LARGEST SET

28

PIECES IN 6115 SHARK SCOUT, THE SMALLEST SET



## REVIEW

**Year of release:** 1995 **Aftermarket price:** £34 new, £3 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 28

## 6115 SHARK SCOUT

## A ONE-MINIFIGURE UNDERWATER

transport made for a great introduction to this theme. These little models were great for complementing the bigger ones and 6115 Shark Scout did the job beautifully. In Space, it was always a bit odd when the tiny ships didn't have enclosed cockpits – here it makes sense though, because this character is wearing his scuba gear. Carefully placed levers actually give the impression that the minifigure is steering the little vehicle and the back propellor makes it clear how it's zipping around the ocean floor.

It's a compact little vessel.



**Year of release:** 1995 **Aftermarket price:** £65 new, £21 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 103

## 6155 DEEP SEA PREDATOR

## UNDOUBTEDLY THE QUINTESSENTIAL

Aquasharks set, 6155 Deep Sea Predator conveys everything you need to know about this faction in one model. What comes through clearly is that the Aquasharks love sharks. The submarine is built in the shape of a shark, with the slightly cartoony but angry face printed on the elongated windscreen element, then the fin up top, pectoral fins to the side and the caudal fin leading to the propellor.

The villainy is conveyed through the red, transparent orange and blue, which couldn't be further from the cheery yellow and blue on the Aquanauts subs. The minifigure pilot

(unfortunately there's only one) continues this motif with his black and red scuba gear.

Both the front and back flaps open up, so that the pilot can be placed in the cockpit and so that the crystals can be stored. The flexible arms, which used Homemaker figure arm elements for

a wonderful new purpose, could grab the crated crystal and then reach the back of the sub to store it.

If there's one set from the Aquasharks range that sums up the whole concept and is worth adding to a LEGO collection, it's this one.

It opens at the back and front.

The sub has a shark shape.





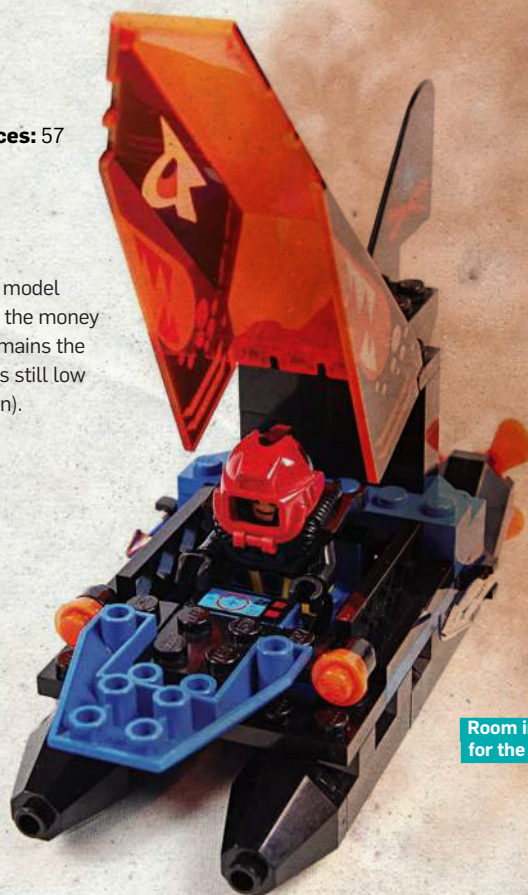
**Year of release:** 1996 **Aftermarket price:** £17 new, £9 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 57

## 6135 SPY SHARK

**THIS SECOND YEAR** Aquasharks set is the laziest product from the subtheme. Clearly wanting to utilise the printed windscreen element, the whole model is built around that one piece. At the time of release though, it was a great way to get that piece as well as the

printed fin element – so although the model itself is pretty weak, what you got for the money worked out quite well. In fact, that remains the case today, as the aftermarket price is still low (although new copies are not common).

It's all built around one piece.



Room inside for the pilot.

**Year of release:** 1996 **Aftermarket price:** £265 new, £89 used / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 258

## 6190 SHARK'S CRYSTAL CAVE

**ONE OF THE** frustrations that LEGO designers who were around in the 1980s and 1990s had is that they would offer up an array of interesting, fresh models for marketers to choose from; then typically, the builds that would be selected for the product range would be very similar to those that were already selling or testing well. It very much feels like 6190 Shark's Crystal Cave was playing it safe.

The main model here is essentially a larger version of 6155 Deep Sea Predator, bulkier in every way. While it does look more heavy duty, that means it loses some of the sleek elegance that the earlier set had. In a fun touch, the transparent blue canopies that are common to the Aquanauts faction are recoloured in transparent orange and added to the side of the build. Fortunately, with the sub being larger, this time around two minifigures are included to crew it.

What is pretty cool is that the set includes a display stand – a rudimentary structure that provides the titular cave, presumably for keeping sharks, storing crystals or trapping enemies, that the submarine can comfortably sit on top of.

The most appealing part though is that the simple cave is built on a recoloured Space baseplate, with the lunar surface now representing the ocean floor. Different shades of blue are printed onto the plate in order to give the sense of murky depths – it's an absolutely beautiful baseplate.

The set is reminiscent of a shuttle.



The sub sits over the cave.



# RE-BUILD

## SHARK SCOUT

The Aquasharks can use this modern craft to zip around the ocean floor

**Words & Pics:** Daniel Konstanski

**IT'S HARD TO** go along with the 'this or that aspect of LEGO was better back in the day' arguments. From licensing to piece count, complexity, minifigure detail, breadth of subject matter, ubiquity and much more, pretty much every aspect of the modern LEGO experience is better than what came before.

There's one exception to this – small sets. Whether due to inflation, market research about what children want or some other factor, it pretty much takes £20 before a set gets good nowadays. For a perfect example of how amazing small sets used to be, look no further than 6115 Shark Scout – one of only two original Aquashark sets released in 1995.

Costing only a couple dollars, even the skimpiest allowance could enable a young LEGO fan to acquire it. Shark Scout was a perfect companion to the larger Deep Sea Predator, but also a more than adequate standalone model – above all else it was swooshable. Almost no tiny set today compares, which is why Shark Scout was selected for an update in this month's Blockstalgia. The design goals were to match both the original's size and swooshability, while bringing the aesthetic up to modern standards. ■

The original 6115 Shark Scout from 1995.



1



Begin with a 2x8 plate.

2



Flip the 2x8 over.

3



Begin constructing the sub's underside.

4



Build two of these constructs.



5



Attach to the underside as shown.

6



Complete the underside.

7



Flip the build over and add cheese slopes.

8



Construct two of these.

9



Attach them on either side of the sub.

10



Continue building the front of the vehicle.

**AQUAZONE**  
From 5-12 years

HELLO BRAD! I'VE FOUND AN ENERGY CRYSTAL!

STAY PUT! WE'RE SENDING A PICK-UP SUB!

I BETTER PUT IT IN THE BACK FOR SAFETY.

HEY! THE AQUASHARK SUBMARINE HAS FORGOTTEN THE PICK-UP!

NO, JUST AN EMPTY BOX!

- WOW! ANOTHER EXCELLENT CRYSTAL!

- YOU WON'T FOOL US TWICE!

**AQUASHARKS**

**NEW** 8155 Aquashark Submarine. A super stealthy sub designed with two launch crystals.

**NEW** 8156 Aquashark Shark.

**AQUANAUTS**

**NEW** 8175 Aquanaut Outpost.

**NEW** 8176 Aquanaut DSRV II. Replaces the way for the classic special 12-point.

**NEW** 8177 Aqua Dome 7. The Aquanauts' mission base where the crystals are collected, but beware of the Octopus!

New products available from February 15.

**LEGO SYSTEM**



11



Build up the sub's front.

12



Give the model a curved shape.

13



This smooth element updates the look.

14



Construct the rear.

15



The propeller will go here.

16



Finish out the top of the sub.

17



Add fins to the bottom.

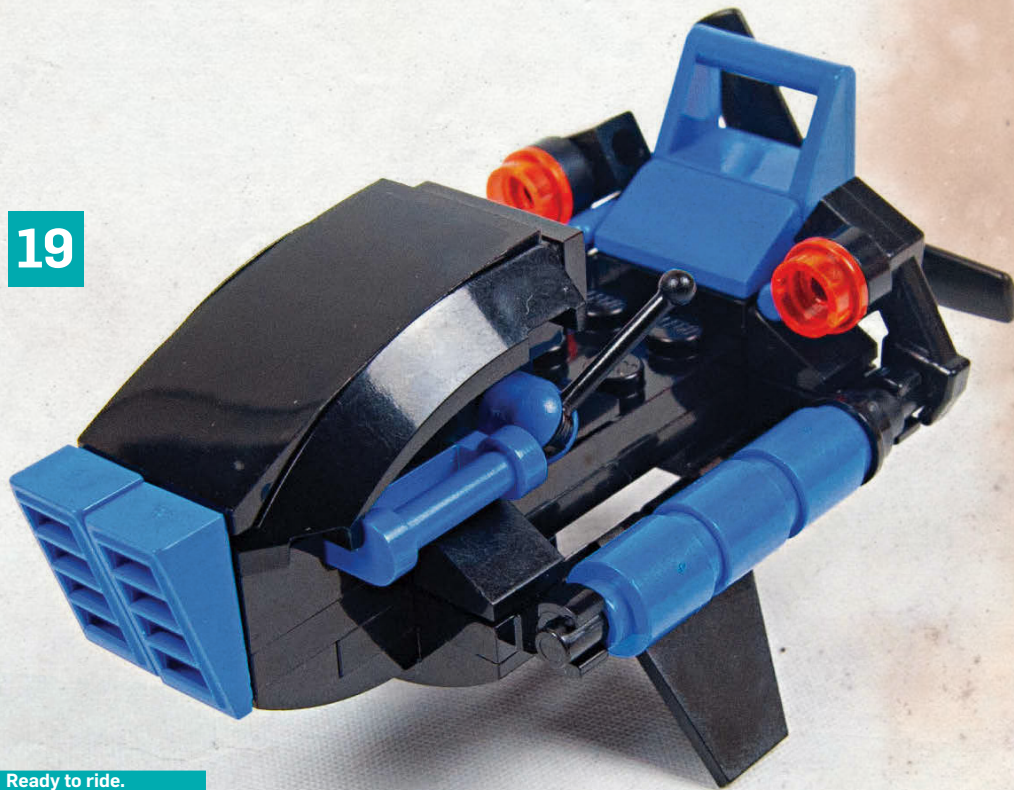
18



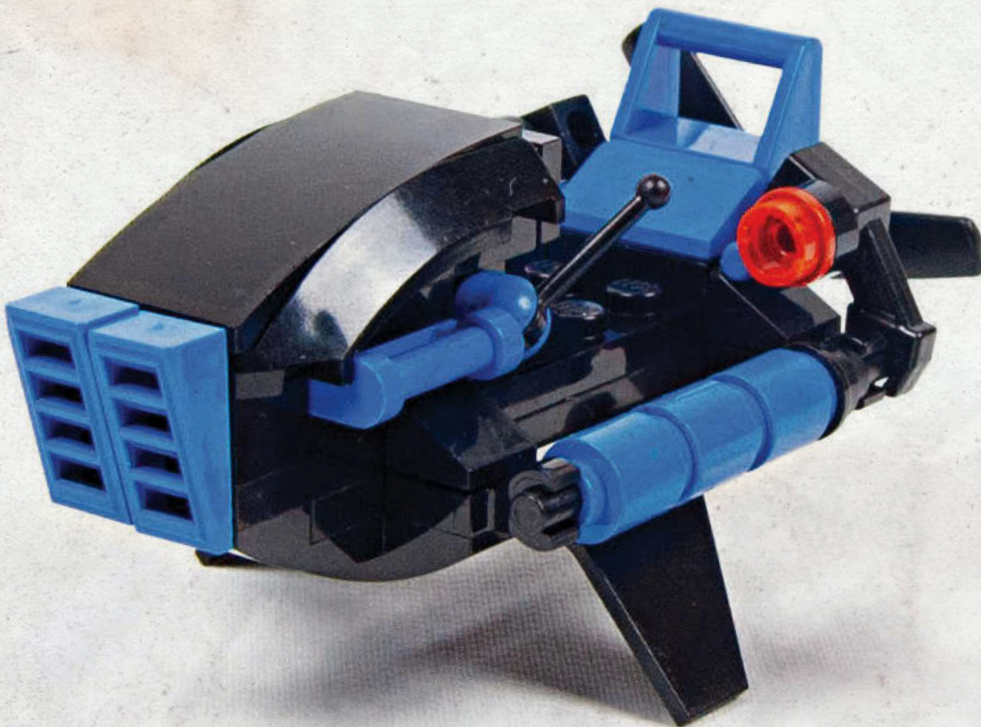
Lights are attached for a splash of Aquasharks orange.



19



Ready to ride.





# Blocks

# BRICKTIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary. Blocks magazine helps you to decode it

## A

**ABS:** Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

**AFOL:** Adult Fan of LEGO.

## B

**Billund:** Town in Denmark where the the LEGO Group was founded and the headquarters is located.

**Bley:** Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

**BrickLink:** The online marketplace for buying and selling LEGO bricks, now owned by the LEGO Group.

**Brickset:** An online database of LEGO sets.

**Brick Train Awards:** Annual fan organised train building contest.

**BURP:** Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

## C

**Cheese Slope:** A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

**Clone Brands:** Knock-off construction toys that copy aspects of, or sometimes entire, official LEGO sets.

**Custom:** A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

**Customiser:** A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

## D

**D2C:** Direct to Consumer sets. Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

**Dark Ages:** The period in a LEGO fan's life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

**Draft:** An activity common at LEGO

club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

## E

**Erling:** A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

**Evergreen:** A theme that returns year after year, rather than only being available for one or two years.

## G

**Greeble:** Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

**GWP:** Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

## H

**Half-Stud Offset:** A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

## I

**Ideas:** Platform for fans to upload set ideas with the potential for them to become official LEGO releases.

**Illegal:** LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particular connections that stress the LEGO elements.

**Inventory:** The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

**IP:** Intellectual property. The LEGO Group has many IP partners, such as Disney and Nintendo.

## J

**Jumper Plate:** A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

## K

**KFOL:** Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

## L

**LCP:** LEGO Certified Professional. A professional brick builder authorised by and affiliated with the LEGO Group.

**LDD:** LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

**Legal:** LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

**LEGOLAND:** Family theme parks inspired by the LEGO brand. The original location is in Billund, but now found all around the world.

**LEGO Masters:** The competitive televised building contest, with local versions airing globally.

**LEGOs:** Incorrect plural of LEGO.

**LLDC:** LEGOLAND Discovery Centre. A mini, indoor versions of the theme parks aimed specifically at children.

**LUG:** LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

## M

**Microfig:** Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

**Midi Scale:** Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

**Minifigure Scale:** A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

**MOC:** My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

**Mod:** A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or



adding to original designs.

## N

**NPU:** Nice part usage. Taking a LEGO element and using it a new or unexpected way, usually different to the way it is most commonly used.

## P

**PAB:** Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

**PAB Wall:** The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

**Purist:** A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

## S

**S@H or SAH:** The official online store, LEGO.com. Used to be Shop at Home.

**Sigfig:** The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or 'signature minifigure'.

**SNOT:** Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

## T

**TFOL:** Teen Fan of LEGO.

**TLG:** The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

**TMA:** Too many acronyms.

**TRU:** Toys R Us.

## U

**UCS:** Ultimate Collector Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

## V

**Vignette:** A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

## W

**WIP:** Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

## BASIC BRICKS

**Baseplates:** The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling rocks, hills and other landscaping.

**Bricks:** At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

**Measurements:** LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

**Plates:** Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

**Printed Parts:** Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

**Studs:** The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

**Tiles:** Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brictionary, drop us a line at [graham@blocksmag.com](mailto:graham@blocksmag.com) to get it included.





# LEGO EVENTS

Do you run a physical or virtual event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via [graham@blocksmag.com](mailto:graham@blocksmag.com) and we'll add it to the list

## OCTOBER 2022

### Bricklincs (UK)

**When:** October 8

**Where:** Christ's Hospital School, Lincoln

**What's on:** This long-running LEGO show is back, with a day of LEGO displays, activities and a marketplace.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/BrickLincs](https://facebook.com/BrickLincs)

### Birmingham Brick Festival (UK)

**When:** October 16

**Where:** The Factory Works, Birmingham

**What's on:** A commercial one-day fan event with LEGO model displays, marketplace and activities.

**Visit:** [brickfestivalevents.com](https://brickfestivalevents.com)

### Brick O' Deen (UK)

**When:** October 22

**Where:** Queens Cross Church, Aberdeen

**What's on:** LEGO displays, activities and traders at this charity show in North East Scotland.

**Visit:** [tartanlug.com](https://tartanlug.com)

### Sheffield Brickfest (UK)

**When:** October 22 – 23

**Where:** High Storrs School, Sheffield

**What's on:** LEGO show in Sheffield featuring models, marketplace and activities.

**Visit:** [sheffieldlug.org](https://sheffieldlug.org)

### Milton Keynes Brick Festival (UK)

**When:** October 29

**Where:** The Ridgeway Centre, Milton Keynes

**What's on:** LEGO displays and activities along with vendors selling new sets, old sets and loose bricks.

**Visit:** [brickfestivalevents.com](https://brickfestivalevents.com)

## NOVEMBER 2022

### Shildon Brick Show (UK)

**When:** November 5 – 6

**Where:** Locomotion Museum, Shildon, County Durham

**What's on:** The UK's largest free entry LEGO show – LEGO displays from builders across the UK, activities and a marketplace.

**Visit:** [brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon](https://brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon)

### Bristol Brick Show (UK)

**When:** November 19 – 20

**Where:** Gloucestershire County Cricket Club, Bristol

**What's on:** LEGO exhibitions and activities.

**Visit:** [gertlug.co.uk/eventst](https://gertlug.co.uk/eventst)

## DECEMBER 2022

### Monkey Bricks (UK)

**When:** December 4

**Where:** Civic Centre, Heywood

**What's on:** A one-day fan event with LEGO model displays, marketplace and activities.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/groups/760519838304049](https://facebook.com/groups/760519838304049)

### Train Show (USA)

**When:** December 10 – 11

**Where:** Cantigny Park, Wheaton, Illinois

**What's on:** Produced by the Northern Illinois LEGO Train Club, it is the group's largest annual show with large scale train displays.

**Visit:** [cantigny.org](https://cantigny.org)

### Brick Fest Live (USA)

**When:** December 3 – 4

**Where:** Meadowlands Exposition Center, Secaucus, New Jersey

**What's on:** Life-sized models, live interactive stage shows, building activities and photo ops.

**Visit:** [brickfestlive.com](https://brickfestlive.com)

### Brick Fest Live (USA)

**When:** December 10 – 11

**Where:** Oklahoma City Convention Center, Oklahoma

**What's on:** Life-sized models, live interactive stage shows, building activities and photo ops.

**Visit:** [brickfestlive.com](https://brickfestlive.com)

### Brick Fest Live (USA)

**When:** December 17 – 18

**Where:** RMB Regional Fairgrounds, Robstown, Texas

**What's on:** Life-sized models, live interactive stage shows, building activities and photo ops.

**Visit:** [brickfestlive.com](https://brickfestlive.com)

## JANUARY 2023

### Thirsk Brick Show (UK)

**When:** January 16 – 17

**Where:** Thirsk & Sowerby Town Hall, North Yorkshire

**What's on:** In aid of Holy Rood House in Thirsk. LEGO fan displays, traders and activities.

**Visit:** [brickalleylug.co.uk/thirsk](https://brickalleylug.co.uk/thirsk)

### Calder Valley Brick Show (UK)

**When:** January 29

**Where:** Mytholmroyd Community & Leisure Centre, Mytholmroyd

**What's on:** Professional model displays, competitions and trade stalls.

**Visit:** [brickshowtickets.co.uk](https://brickshowtickets.co.uk)

## FEBRUARY 2023

### Bricktastic (UK)

**When:** February 24 – 25

**Where:** Manchester Central Convention Centre, Manchester

**What's on:** The biggest LEGO fan event in the UK, with exhibits from builders around the UK, Europe and America, all in aid of Fairy Bricks charity.

**Visit:** [bricktastic.org](https://bricktastic.org)

## MARCH 2023

### Brickish Weekend (UK)

**When:** March 11 – 12

**Where:** National Space Centre, Leicester

**What's on:** This long-running LEGO exhibition is back in Leicester with a huge array of models to admire from builders across the UK.

**Visit:** [brickish.org/events](https://brickish.org/events)

# BRICKSMcGEE

PLAYFUL SINCE 2012

# FROM THE VAULT

For a generation of AFOLs, medium sized catalogues were their YouTube

**Words:** Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski & The LEGO Group

**THERE WAS SOME** sort of magic threshold around £20 to £25 that meant you qualified for a little something extra with LEGO purchases in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. That extra was the medium sized catalogue. The reason it was only sets of a certain size is because the box had to be big enough to fit the catalogue. Accordingly, one of these catalogues was cause for double celebration; it meant you had a decent sized set and on top of that, the chance to salivate over all the other LEGO offerings.

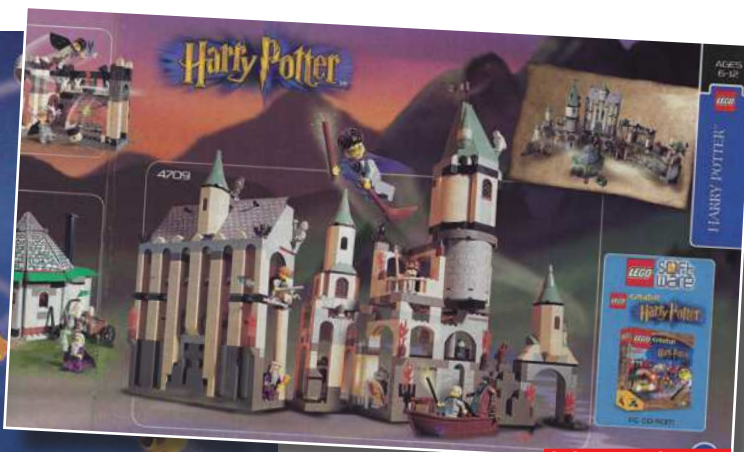
Almost any AFOL who grew up playing with LEGO sets in those years will tell fond stories of flipping through those pages, coveting everything they saw. This was long before the days of webpages or YouTube review videos. Because of this, medium sized catalogues served a very specific purpose and the LEGO Group invested substantial resources ensuring they executed that mission. After all, this was a prime opportunity to make sure the reader knew which LEGO set they wanted to get next.

Thumbnail sized images of individual sets were placed atop much larger

cinematic spreads showing incredible dioramas that any child could only dream of creating. LEGO bricks and sets would be mixed with professional props and backdrops across layouts that were equal parts promotional image and massive museum style layout. Back then there were only a few themes so each would get at least one spread showcasing all that Space, Castle, Town or Pirates had to offer. Because the number of products was also much smaller than today, offerings from past years would be mixed in with the current year's so that each layout included virtually everything currently available within that particular theme. These spreads were amazing and nothing like them exists today.

As the internet and digital revolutions swept the globe, the need for these medium catalogues diminished. Children could now visit the LEGO Group's website at any time and incredible dioramas were replaced by animations. While movement is very cool, all the slick moviemaking in the world can't quite replicate the magic of a huge layout populated by every set currently available. ■

The last medium catalogues were printed in the early 2000s.



In later catalogues, dioramas were replaced by digital backgrounds.



Covers would usually feature minifigures from all available themes in a single scene.



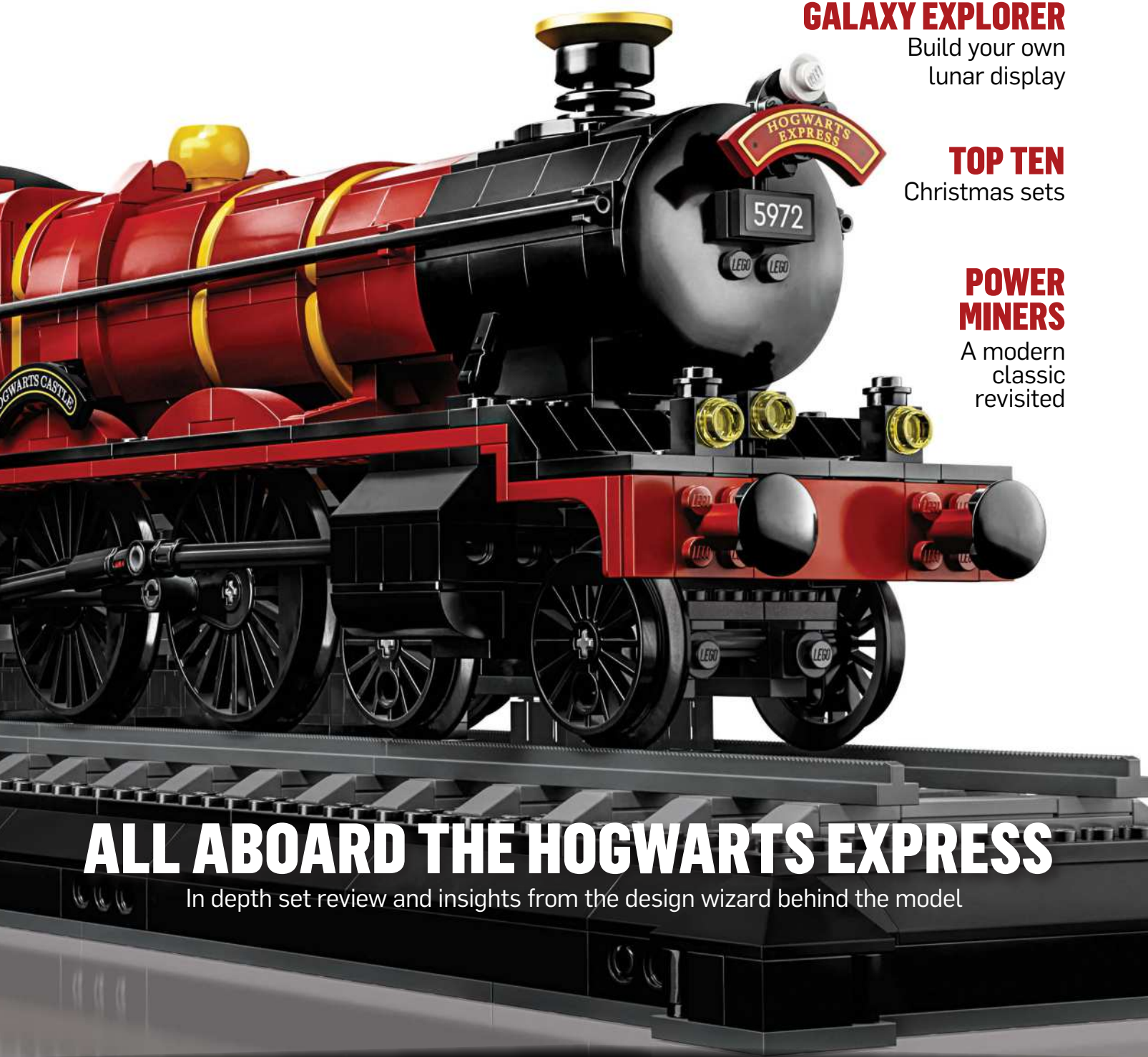
Interior pages featured large layouts with images of individual products overlaid on top.



**NEXT MONTH**

IN SHOPS NOVEMBER 3

# Blocks



## **GALAXY EXPLORER**

Build your own  
lunar display

## **TOP TEN**

Christmas sets

## **POWER MINERS**

A modern  
classic  
revisited

## **ALL ABOARD THE HOGWARTS EXPRESS**

In depth set review and insights from the design wizard behind the model

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